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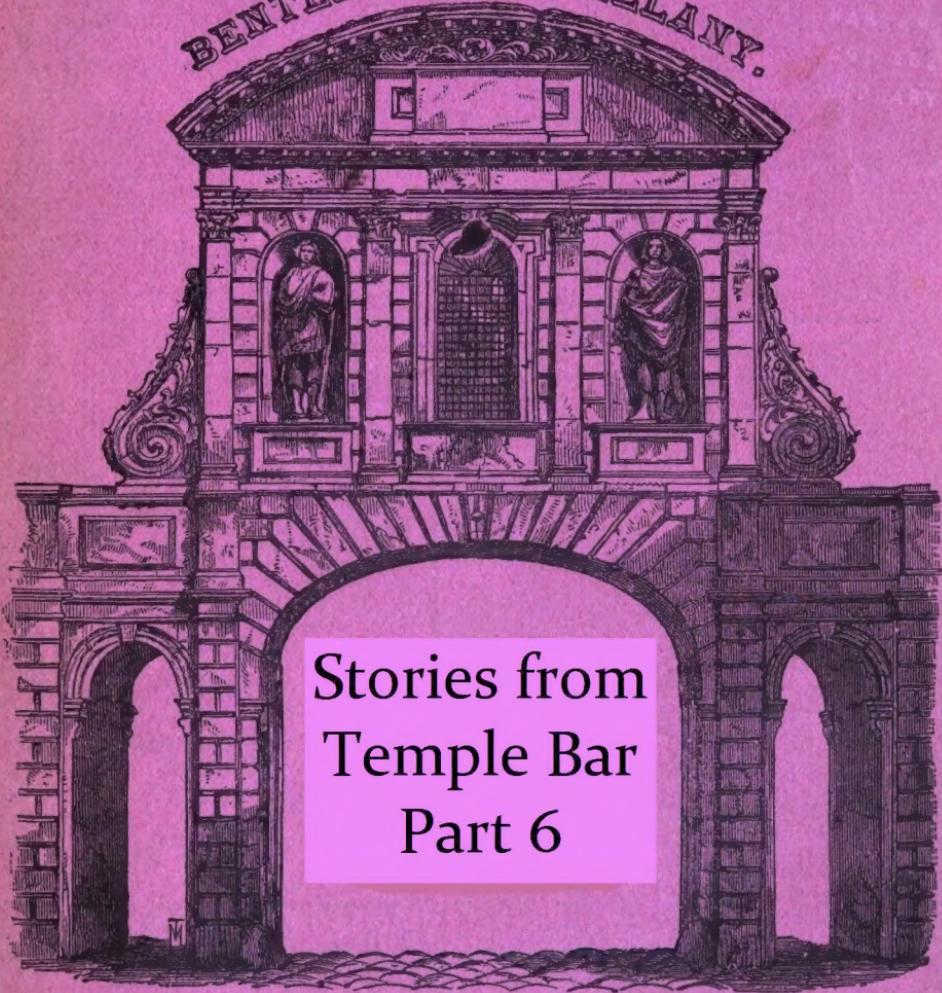
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Stories from Temple Bar Part 6

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Stories from Temple Bar, Part 6 (1893-1902)

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The Vision of Augustin Nynho.

“Augustin Nynho had a bearded demon who taught him all things”—
Lives of the Wizards.

“Look back,” then said the demon, “look back on ages past, and on the chain of fate. On what accidents has the life of every man depended, ages before he came into the world! Had the least of thousands of frail links been broken, never could the greatest of mankind have seen the sun. Consider the first of the imperial Cæsars. What mortal ever was so great as he? And yet—look back into the past.”

With these words the demon gazed steadfastly at Augustin. Immediately the gloom began to break and vanish, and in a few moments Augustin perceived around him, in place of the dusky light which filled the hollow of the rock, a scene illuminated by the sunshine of a summer day.

It seemed to be situated in the depths of some primeval jungle. The spot was a little glade, surrounded by the trunks of lofty palm-trees, the feet of which were rooted amidst gigantic ferns. An exuberant growth of strange and wild vegetation filled the interspaces of the palm-trunks with a mass of moving foliage. Blossoms of marvellous richness, melons, cactuses, convolvuluses, burst like fire through the verdure of the leaves. A kind of antelope, his head thrown back until the points of his long horns almost touched his haunches, was cropping the leaves of a strange tree. The whole scene impressed the mind with a sense of things indescribably quiet and wild. It seemed as if such a solitude could never have been disturbed by the presence even of a savage man.

“That thought is just,” said the voice of the demon—though Augustin had not spoken. “Before the first man walked on earth, these flowers and trees were standing, as now you see them, in the morning sun. But look closely. What see you on the margin of the leaf whose hollow is filled with water?”

Close to them, so close that Augustin could have touched it with his hand, grew a large and hollow leaf, in the cavity of which a few drops of dew were glittering in the sun.

"I see nothing," said Augustin, "except the water in the leaf, and a butterfly spreading his wings on the edge of it."

"Ages since," replied the demon, "that insect basked for a moment's space, as you behold it, on the margin of that leaf. Its life, even for an ephemeral's, was brief. Yet if that insect had not lived, or had opened its pied wings anywhere on earth save on that leaf and at that moment, never would the world's great conqueror have taken his thousand cities and slain his million men. Upon its life, a life of instants, upon the very flutter of its wings, depended, ages of time thereafter, the life of Julius Cæsar. And this I will make clear before your eyes."

Above the leaf on which the butterfly was spreading its wings in the sunshine, the rich golden disk of what seemed a sort of sunflower was swinging to and fro with a very gentle motion on the top of a tall stem; and clinging to the disk and pecking the dry husk of yellow seeds, was a little blue-winged bird. The sunshine fell so strongly on the broad golden circle of the blossom and the bird upon it, that the shadow of them both which fell against an enormous leaf behind, and swayed with the gentle motion of the flower, appeared quite solid in its blackness. The attention of Augustin was arrested by this sharp and moving shadow, when he saw dart forth from behind the leaf on which it fell, a serpent's head. A succession of bright green coils followed; and the snake, moving rapidly along a branch, approached to within a foot or so of the blue bird on the sunflower, and, with darting fork and glittering eyes, drew back its head to strike.

At that instant the attention of the bird, which appeared unconscious of its enemy, was attracted by the bright and coloured wings of the butterfly, which had risen from its resting-place, fluttered for a moment in the sun, and settled itself again upon the leaf. Instantly, leaving the less tempting seeds, and thereby escaping by a hair's breadth the dart of the serpent, the bird flashed down upon the coloured wings, seized the butterfly in its beak, and vanished with it among the leaves into the depths of the jungle. At the same instant the scene began to lose distinctness. Augustin heard the voice of the demon saying, "But for the butterfly the snake would have killed the bird;" and almost before the syllables were pronounced, he found himself in the midst of another scene, wild and desolate still, but differing greatly from that which he had just beheld.

The place was a small bay receding from what appeared to be an Egyptian river. The banks were steep and grassy, and the margin of the water was thickly overgrown with reeds of papyrus. An alligator, half supported on the bank, half floating in the

water, was sluggishly dragging himself to land. The snout of another reptile projected among the rushes like the jag of an old tree. But the attention of Augustin was immediately centred on the first. His exit from the water was not without a purpose. Ten or twelve yards from the edge of the stream, and half concealed among the deep green stems of the grass, an Egyptian child, some four or five years old, was lying asleep, coiled together in a sort of nest.

“Close to this spot,” said the voice of the bearded demon, “now stands the sphinx. But at the time when that child was sleeping in the grass, the first of the Pharaohs was not crowned, nor the foundations of the Great Pyramid yet set among the sands.”

The alligator had drawn himself clear of the water, and was reposing, in a seeming torpor, on the margin. But in reality he was far from dormant. At intervals of a minute or so he moved himself sluggishly forward, a few inches nearer to the sleeping child.

“On the life of that Egyptian baby,” said the demon, “now hangs the after-fate of Cæsar. Whether it will awake or not depends on a most slender chance.”

No sound was in the air to indicate the neighbourhood of human life. The dusky heads of the bulrushes swayed idly in the wind; the white and sapphire circles of the lotus-blossoms swayed as idly on the water. Augustin looked from the sleeper to the alligator. The reptile was not moving; but he had gradually advanced until he was now not many feet distant from the figure in the grass.

The boy was sleeping very lightly. Once or twice he stirred himself, in the manner of a sleeper who is not far from waking. But the creeping alligator made no sound; and now the space of a few seconds in his time of waking would make the difference between life and death. The reptile moved again. One more such movement, and the boy would have a rude arousal.

The alligator lay for perhaps a minute without giving the least token that he was a living creature. Then the long snout was thrust slowly forward, the unwieldy shape began to stir, and foot by foot the hideous jaws advanced upon their prey.

At this instant, when the advance of another yard would have brought the jaws within gripping distance of their object, a bird, skimming near the ground, passed between the sleeper and the sun, uttering at the same moment a wild and startled cry. At the sound the boy’s eyes opened—and as they opened they alighted on the alligator. Startled by the aspect of the frightful monster so close at hand, he struggled to his feet, and made off with tottering steps. The lumbering reptile made no effort to

quicken his motion in pursuit ; and as the boy disappeared among the rose-laurels on the bank, the scene again began to fade and vanish, and the voice of the demon was heard saying, " The bird which awoke the sleeper with its cry comes, by a thousand generations of descent, from the bird which escaped the serpent in the jungle."

Again the darkness cleared. Augustin perceived that he was stationed in a low stone gallery, deeply recessed between enormous pillars, and overlooking, as appeared from the back of the gallery where he found himself, a vast and princely hall. He advanced to the front of the gallery, and looked over. As he did so, the voice of the demon uttered at his ear, " Thus appeared Belshazzar's banquet-chamber on the night that Babylon was taken."

Augustin looked down the hall. The whole length and breadth of the imperial chamber was blazing with the lights and colours of a splendid festival. The building was such as he had never beheld, or had beheld only as fragments of colossal ruin. The walls rose up in their immensity, rich with sculptures of antique Assyrian sovereigns—Ninus hunting a leopard—Semiramis whirling in a chariot—Ninyas, amidst a troop of flower-crowned revellers, uplifting a carved cup. Here and there, beside the image of some monstrous idol, a sphinx lay watching, or an incense-burner, swinging by a chain, gave forth into the air a faint blue cloud of scented vapour. Against the vast columns of hewn porphyry, scored with hieroglyphics from vault to pavement, sat colossal carven figures, their hands reposing on their knees, their countenances, majestically calm, seeming to gaze straight over the heads of the splendid company, as if the scene below them were not worthy of the contemplation of their eternal eyes. From one end of the hall to the other, glittering under the branches of scores of silver candle-bearers, lay a table loaded with the festal vessels ; strange-shaped jugs of gold, flagons serpent-handled and spouted like the jaws of dragons, baskets woven out of silver grass and piled with gaudy melons, jars of precious syrups, wine-cups rough with jewels, salvers stamped with imageries of the ibis and the sacred hawk. At one end of the table, throned under a scarlet canopy, sat the king. On either side of the board the light of myriads of lamps, flaming on the rich and flowing vestments of a crowd of lords and ladies, lighted up the long lines of the banqueters, fell on the reclining forms of lovely women scarcely veiled in spangled tissues, and sparkled far away down the great chamber from gorgets and ankle-rings and clasps of gold.

The company, at the moment when Augustin looked upon them, seemed to be but half recovered from some recent strong excitement. The king himself remained absorbed in a fit of profound abstraction. A group of stately and grey-bearded counsellors who stood at a little distance from the throne, conversed together in low voices, and with looks of doubt and awe.

Augustin had, however, little time to speculate upon the aspect of the company. The voice of the demon uttering a single word cut short his contemplation. "Listen!"

Augustin listened. Above the humming conversation of the banqueters, above the sound of a strange and gentle music which came stealing in from some unseen vicinity, he thought he could distinguish, outside the building, a murmur, low yet turbulent, like that of a great multitude in stealthy motion. None of the guests appeared as yet to hear this sound. But the murmur grew. One of the banqueters paused, with his cup half-raised, to listen; then called the attention of his neighbour; and the two listened together. Then the sound grew louder. The hum of conversation ceased, men sprang to their feet in all parts of the chamber, and looked inquiringly into each other's faces. Women turned white and trembled, screams began to be heard, and finally, as the sound grew more and more distinct, the whole assembly broke into commotion. A tramp of countless feet was heard approaching on the further side of the great curtains which veiled the entrance of the hall. A deafening shout rang out; the curtains were torn open; the lustre glanced like lightning on ten thousand naked swords; and the hall was instantaneously swarming with the soldiers of Cyrus.

As the banqueters fled hither and thither in confusion, the foremost soldier strode straight forward through the crowd towards the king. The attention of Augustin was already fixed upon this man, when he heard the demon's voice beside him saying, "Mark well that foremost soldier!"

The king had started to his feet, and drawn a short sword from his girdle. The Persian, pressing forward, raised his own weapon, and without a moment's hesitation struck full at the king's head. As it happened, however, a sudden jolt received from his neighbour in the crowd turned aside his stroke, and he was almost overbalanced by the force of his own blow. As he reeled for an instant in recovering, he was at the mercy of the king's sword. That sword flew aloft like a streak of light, and in another moment would assuredly have cleft the soldier to the girdle. At that instant an Egyptian, who had been sitting at a neighbouring table, seeing the king in danger, and being too far

to fly to his assistance with a sword, caught up a heavy drinking-flagon from the table and hurled it with tremendous force at the head of the Persian. So far, however, from injuring its object, it saved his life. It missed the soldier altogether, struck the king's sword as it was on the point of descending, and sent it whirling from his hand over the heads of the multitude. The soldier recovered himself in a moment, and again raised his sword. The stroke descended with effect. The king sank heavily forward. The golden circlet of the diadem, cut clean through and covered with blood, struck the edge of the table in his fall, dropped from his temples, and was instantly trodden to fragments under the feet of the crowd.

Augustin gazed down the chamber. It was crammed from end to end with a surging multitude. Among the deep fluttering crimson and purple of the festal dresses the light glanced everywhere on the crests of helmets and the blades of waving swords. Mingled with the hoarse thunder, no longer repressed, of a mighty army round the walls, with the clashing of arms, and the shouts of the assailants, rang the shrill and piercing shrieks of women. Then by degrees the noise grew fainter. The scene began to fade. The calm and solemn faces of the pillared figures, gazing straight over the wild turbulence below them, grew more and more obscure. Then as darkness and silence returned, the voice of the demon was heard saying, "The Egyptian who hurled the flagon is descended, after many generations, from the child whom you saw escape from the reptile of the Nile."

Light returned as the demon spoke. Before the eyes of Augustin appeared the clear flame of an agate lamp, which revealed the interior of a luxurious sleeping-chamber. Through the open casement appeared, high over a crowd of shadowy buildings, the black outline of the Parthenon on the heights of the Acropolis, against the rising moon. The apartment, though not large, was bright, rich and warm. The ceiling, rising in a vault, was richly painted with throngs of rosy boys peeping between vine-leaves, pelting each other with roses, riding on the cubs of tigers, or skimming on bright wings in chase of gorgeous birds. The floor was overspread with leopard skins and rugs woven out of rich and blooming wools. The broidered curtains on either side of the window were each looped back with a silken rope, on which hung golden apples. In an angle of the wall, upon a pedestal, a figure of Apollo, carved in marble, stood balancing a quoit, in act to throw. A tambour-frame against the window displayed, half-worked, a picture of Helen on the walls of Troy. The lamp, sustained in the hand of an alabaster Psyche,

shone with a warm and mellow light over a couch of figured ivory; and on the couch, half-buried in a pile of cushions, a young Greek girl was lying asleep. Her flowing white dress was gathered round the waist with a slender zone of gold, her loosened hair streamed over the edge of the cushions to the floor, and her feet were covered with a panther's skin. In the depths of a silver mirror fixed against the wall the whole scene was reflected, the beautiful sleeper, the agate lamp, the open window, the heights of the Acropolis, and the dark outline of the Parthenon against the rising moon. The chamber was so quiet that the lightest sound outside the window, the footfall of a solitary passenger on the marble pavement far below, came with singular distinctness on the silence. The soft air of the summer night, floating through the open window, made the curtain swing and the lamp-flame tremble. A slight rustling sound became audible. Another person had entered the apartment. A Greek girl also.

Tall, pale, her dress disordered, her lips parted, her whole aspect wild and startling, she moved stealthily forward, making two shadows against the wall, one in the lamplight, another in the moon, and stood beside the couch. As she did so, the light sparkled on the blade of a slender, naked dagger, which she held in her right hand.

"In ancient Athens," said the bearded demon, "these girls were rivals for the love of the same man."

The tall, pale figure beside the couch, one hand pressed against her heart, as if to still its beatings, the other grasping the dagger, stood looking down upon the sleeper, who was smiling in her dreams. The right hand of the sleeping girl, drooping from the couch, held lightly in its grasp a letter written in Greek characters. The gaze of the other fixed itself, as if in a kind of fascination, upon the little scroll, and on the words with which it was inscribed. And as she looked, her teeth were locked together, and her eyes glittered like fire.

Against the wall behind her hung a piece of tapestry, representing Diana and her wood-nymphs bathing in a spring. Suddenly this curtain parted. A woman's face looked out from an inner chamber. It was the face of a Persian slave.

For an instant or two she remained transfixed, as if in a stupor of amazement. Then, as the other raised her dagger, she darted forward with the speed of lightning, but without the slightest sound, seized the standing figure round the waist and drew her backwards from the couch. The other, with a shriek of terror, started back a pace or two, and with dilated eyes and cowering

form, her breath coming and going in quick pants, like that of a trapped animal, stood glaring at her assailant, as at an apparition. The dagger had dropped from her hand, and lay glittering on the ground. The Persian stooped, caught up the weapon, advanced a step, and without an instant's hesitation plunged it up to the hilt in the other's breast. She staggered back, fell against the window, and still glaring at the Persian, as if terror had rendered her incapable of any other sensation, remained for an instant or two, with the dagger in her bosom, supported against the projection of the sill.

All this had passed with the swiftness of thought. Augustin saw the sleeper, roused by the shriek, raise herself among the cushions, and look, with eyes which seemed not to comprehend what they beheld, from the Persian woman standing beside the couch, to the figure which at the same moment sank forward in a heap upon the ground. As she did so, the whole scene faded; and the voice of the demon declared itself in the darkness saying, "The Persian woman, who saved the life of the sleeping girl, is the descendant, after many generations, of the soldier who cut down the king of Babylon."

Even as the demon spoke, the darkness had again begun to vanish. Augustin felt that he was once more in the open air. Against his face blew the warm breath of a summer wind; and he immediately discovered that the city of the Violet Crown had given place to the city of the Seven Hills. The place in which he found himself was not to be mistaken. It was the amphitheatre of Rome.

Augustin was stationed on the third range from the arena, between a Greek woman who was following every movement of the combatants with the most intent observance, and an old grey Roman, whose face was disfigured by a frightful scar, and who, with his hands propped upon a stick, was contemplating the fighters with an aspect of critical disapprobation, and slowly shaking his head from side to side. The hour was late; the spectacle was nearly over; and the sun was setting redly and bathing the whole scene in a flood of crimson light. The ruddy glow fell upon the faces of thousands of spectators, rising range above range far against the sky. A portion of the great circle was occupied by the common people, whose multitude of sober togas presented a strong contrast to the remaining space, where a brilliant company swept backwards from each side of the lofty throne on which the Consul sat beneath a roof of marble; while the imperial eagles, wrought in gold, blazed on crimson and purple hangings, and, set like images upon the points of columns, flashed on high over the

heads of the multitude from the four corners of the colossal arch.

A loud murmur of the people at a crisis of the combat directed the eyes of Augustin to the gladiators in the ring. Of these there were two only. One of the pair was armed with a shield and a heavy sword—the other with a three-pronged fork and a light net. The latter had already received a wound, and it seemed certain that the other, who was still uninjured, would shortly put an end to the combat by cutting down his antagonist with his sword. Augustin was so thinking when he heard the voice of the demon saying, “On the life of the net-fighter now hangs the thread of fate.”

In the course of the combat the antagonists were moving round the circle of the arena, the swordsman pressing forward, the active net-fighter continually eluding the attack, and watching for an opportunity to entangle the other in his meshes. They were now just below the place where Augustin was stationed. As he looked, the net-fighter, espousing an opportunity, made a desperate attempt to entangle his opponent. But he was weakened by his wound and fatigued with the long contest. He missed his aim, recovered himself with difficulty, and attempted to retreat from the reach of the swordsman. But he was no longer able to move faster in escape than the other could follow in pursuit. The swordsman, taking a long stride forward, raised his weapon. And now it seemed as if nothing could avert the fate of the net-fighter. The spectators were already leaning forward and turning down their thumbs, when suddenly the whole circus rang with an appalling shriek.

It came from the Greek woman at the side of Augustin. On seeing the peril of the net-fighter she had sprung to her feet, thrown forward her hands in the air, and was now gazing with a face of agony at the two combatants in the ring. The swordsman, startled by the piercing shriek, looked round—and in that instant the net-fighter, sensible of nothing but his own danger, and seizing the opportunity with the instinct of despair, instantly entangled him in the meshes of his net.

The gladiator struggled to release himself, but in vain. He was encumbered by his armour, and the strong light cords clung round his limbs like fetters. The net-fighter now had the victory in his hands. He raised his prong, and with outstretched arm appealed to the spectators for judgment. The people, however, were not disposed to sacrifice the swordsman to this turn of fortune. Every thumb in the circus was now turned upwards, in sign that the life of the vanquished should be spared.

The net-fighter lowered his prong, and released the swordsman from the meshes. At the same time the bright arena, the blazoned eagles, the multitude of faces, vanished; and the voice of the demon again came out of the darkness, saying, "The Greek woman, whose shriek saved the life of her lover, the net-fighter, is descended from the girl of Athens who was rescued by her Persian slave. And now weigh well my words. It was a son of this same net-fighter who saved the life of Cæsar at the time when, in his youth, the pirates seized him on his way from Rome to Rhodes."

While the demon spoke these words Augustin again perceived about him the twilight of the hollow of the rock which was the demon's dwelling. And again the demon spoke, and Augustin listened.

"Thus, from the flash of an insect's wing, thousands of years before mankind appeared on earth, came the fates of life and death to men of far-divided times and lands; to the child of Egypt—to the soldier of Cyrus—to the maiden of Athens—to the gladiator of Rome—and, finally, to the greatest of the Cæsars. But Cæsar changed the world. And now no man breathes, from Rome herself to Albion, that wild and distant isle which Rome subdued, whose being has not felt the influence of the flutter of that wing.

"This is the frail-linked chain of Circumstance on which the mightiest depend. And thus do the weakest actions and the greatest become equal in the end."

With these words the demon became silent. Augustin mused; and in the twilight of the hollow rock the lucent eyes of the demon shone, but now he spoke no more.

Théophile Gautier.

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER became a journalist because he could not afford to remain a poet. It was a long struggle, but it ended in his being unable to close his eyes to the fact that nowhere was poetry considered otherwise than an agreeable pastime worthy of no serious acknowledgment, and assuredly no pecuniary recompense.

One hears a good deal in France of the encouragement given to literature and the arts, but the service rendered to authors and painters has justly been called, by one of them, a groundless boast.

The poor, the sick, the unhappy, stretch out their hands in vain, and those who are in full vigour are not asked what work best suits the quality of their talent—what it gives them pleasure to do—but are condemned as surely as possible to some uncongenial task which enervates and exhausts, whilst barely yielding means of subsistence.

Through all the political changes of the day no dynasty could find a place for the author borne down to inferior work by sheer necessity, and prevented from spreading his wings for the want of daily bread. *Le pauvre Théo*, as he often called himself, had personal friends amongst the legislators in the Second Empire and the Second Republic; but however greatly governments may differ in other respects, they are generally of one mind with regard to literary impecuniosity.

It was the time of the Romanticists—the time of the Cénacle—that celebrated social reunion which was formed of all the choicest spirits of the time: men whose names became famous in every rank of contemporary art, whose aim was perfect literary freedom, comprehending no limits, no prohibitions, no proprieties; whose creed was summed up by Victor Hugo in the words, “Whatever is really true and beautiful is everywhere true and beautiful”; and who, moreover, were bound together in such close intimacy and warm affection as would seem of itself in our own less impressionable day to deserve the epithet of romanticism.

Fine wits, fine poets, fine painters, who in the first flush of youth had known feelings and produced works never afterwards equalled, could not forget in all their after-life those days of pure enthusiasm where self-interest had no place, and it was seriously believed that one could live on art.

A member of the Cénacle was everywhere conspicuous by locks descending to the waist, long flowing beard, fantastic moustaches, scarlet doublet, and Spanish cloak. Gautier, whose pallid face and passionate dark eyes announced the *fonds méridional* he was always proud to acknowledge, was said to look like one of the Abencerages gone astray in the midst of civilisation, and scarcely less singular in appearance were others of the brotherhood—the sculptor David, Alfred de Musset, the melancholy historian Rabbe, and the chief figure of the group, imposing, colossal, “*notre grand Victor*.”

Gautier never spoke of the Cénacle without emotion, and in a letter to one of his old companions he wrote: “Twenty-seven years already separate me from that time, and the memory of it is as fresh as the memory of yesterday; the impression of enchantment is never effaced—from the banishment where one treads on all the thorns and stones of the road one turns a sad gaze back to the lost Paradise! So much happiness could not last; to be young, intelligent, to love one another, to comprehend and discuss every description of art—what better life could be conceived? And those who have lived it retain a picture that can never fade.”

Of a surety such happiness could not last. Each had to follow the separate path indicated by choice or necessity, but in spite of the inevitable separation, the little band of originals remained faithful to the last moment of their lives, with a warmth of attachment no amount of time could abate.

When Victor Hugo, after many years of exile, returned to France, Gautier was asked if he had seen him.

“Certainly,” was the reply.

“How did you find him?” was the next question, and Gautier said—

“*Délicieux!*”

Even the widest difference of opinion, even conflicting interests could not disturb their friendship; witness the literary battle between author and publisher when Maxime Du Camp insisted on the suppression of some realistic passages in ‘*Madame Bovary*,’ and Flaubert refused to part with them in a sort of fury.

“But we were bound together,” said Maxime, “and nothing could separate us.”

In the year 1836, Gautier, already well known in the literary

world, was offered the post of art critic to the *Press*, edited by Emile de Girardin. Nothing could have been more irksome and unsatisfactory to the poet, whose true vocation was to speak the *langue immortelle* strange to common mortals. Nevertheless, here, as elsewhere, he displayed qualities of a very high order, well knowing that his articles were swallowed up and lost in the weekly "copy." He used to say, "The journal disappears and is forgotten, the book only is important"; but a regular and assured income had become a necessity to him, not only for his own support, but for many who were dependent upon him, or who at all events claimed a right to his earnings. Had he been able to choose his own subjects, papers of considerable value and interest might have been added to his already published essays, for he was himself a capable artist; but as the exhibition of pictures took place only once a year, the theatrical notices, which had hitherto passed through many hands without satisfying the editor, were imposed upon him, and it became his laborious and difficult task to discuss the merits of pieces which, for the most part, possessed no merits at all.

Placing himself in the position of the unlucky playwright, to speak the truth and nothing but the truth was to him a painful, almost impossible duty. Wherever he could praise it was a different matter—"Il est si doux de louer," he would say with characteristic gentleness; but in all the articles worked out with so much laborious distaste there was never a word betraying the least ill-will or irritation. He executed his tasks with all the coolness of a good workman, but what he had to endure is only to be imagined by those whose position is the same. He was besieged by authors, actors, and managers; the favour of his good word was solicited on every side. He was exhorted to visit studios, to decipher manuscripts, to bolster up imaginary talent, and a refusal, however courteously worded, was met by a dozen voices calling on men and gods to witness his cruelty and injustice.

It might be thought that employment so onerous would be well paid, and the advantage to the paper of a distinguished name duly acknowledged, but as a matter of fact nothing could be more modest than the salary and more ungracious than the editor.

On one occasion some sympathetic words escaped his pen on having to write the obituary notice of a poet, who, like Gautier himself, had become a journalist, and this gave offence to Emile de Girardin, who openly discredited the article, and spoke of it in terms of unreasonable annoyance, remarking that the writer in

passing over the fact that there were many steps in the ladder of preferment, had evinced a blameworthy jealousy of those more fortunate or more talented than himself.

His own partisans were justly irritated at this, and exclaimed : “ If there ever was a man free from envy and jealousy, it is the good and kindly Théo.” He himself said sadly, “ There is but one reply to this—to resign ; but that I cannot afford to do. I must submit to insult, which proves how right I was in saying that a poet may be reduced to hateful work for want of daily bread. Alas ! I cannot throw my paper at the editor’s head, for it is my only means of support and that of others.”

Some time after this, Maxime Du Camp, finding himself alone with Emile de Girardin, asked him the motive of his harsh and injurious comments, and he replied, “ Gautier is an idiot ! I put a fortune into his hands ! His articles should have brought him in thirty or forty thousand francs a year. Managers of theatres alone would have given him all that for a word of praise. Why, since he left the *Press* he got on the staff of the *Moniteur*—the Government organ !—and yet he makes nothing out of that ! I repeat he is an idiot, and doesn’t understand journalism ! ”

The secret of the anxieties and difficulties which weighed down *le pauvre Théo* to the very end of his days may be gathered from a letter found amongst his scattered writings, which have been collected with the greatest patience and energy by the Vicomte Spoelberch de Lovenjoul. It was written in 1858 to one of his sisters :—

“ My constant regret is to be so poor and to give you so little. I feel I have to answer for you to those who are gone, and as you well know I shall perform that duty to my latest breath. Do not add to all my miseries by such sentences as you have just written. I am very sad, and have been occupied with the ‘copy’ on which depend so many mouths, both small and great; but my mind is like a broken-down horse. I remember the same feeling whilst I was writing on the Sunday that our mother died—and that ‘copy’ was used to bury her.”

De Girardin was mistaken in saying that Gautier did not understand journalism : he only did not understand its baser side, but he brought to it many invaluable aids. He possessed the most extraordinary memory, and employed it to utilise his great and very promiscuous reading. He seized on everything that came to hand, and whatever he read—history, poetry, stories of travel and adventure—remained indelibly fixed upon his mind ; he was very methodical, and by a sort of intuitive classification could turn to what he knew on any subject he required. He was a perfect dictionary to his friends, who, when in doubt as to a fact, a date, or a quotation, used to say, “ *Il n’y a que feuilleter Théo.*”

It was true that his want of interest in works which he could neither praise nor blame could hardly be disguised ; the indifference he could not help feeling with regard to the ephemeral works of which he had to speak was set down to hurry and carelessness. The very authors his good nature spared were the first to hint at want of power ; it was said that his views were commonplace and his writing tame ; but when it came to his personal convictions—to his judgment as an artist—Gautier was immovable. He would make no concession to the fashion of a day, and although he adopted without reserve the romantic theories of the Cénacle, it was remarked that he used them in the service of his own originality, and that, in practice, he only took from them just so much as it suited him to take, accepting no control—not even that of Victor Hugo.

The first stories he wrote during the most violent outburst of romanticism are obviously satirical, and the eccentricities he did not refuse to share were treated with a certain amount of raillery. Speaking of one of the romantic band, he said, "Our friend is deep in the arcana of the Middle Ages, but speak to him of Napoleon and he would be rather puzzled."

His love for the extravagant in dress was a curious point in a character so retiring ; he often mixed allusions to it with more important subjects, and was heard to say, for example : "It was in our youthful days when the romantic school was burning with its brightest flame, and I wore my crimson satin doublet."

Maxime Du Camp gives some laughable anecdotes of this peculiarity. One morning Gautier rushed into his room exclaiming, "See what these free institutions come to ! I am ordered to mount guard, or else be sent to prison for four and twenty hours !"

"But why should you not mount guard ?" said Maxime with naïve surprise.

"What ? Dress myself up in a ridiculous costume ? Am I not sufficiently humiliated by having to wear a frock coat like a policeman without having to add epaulettes on my shoulders, and a shako with a tuft ? I will never serve in any army where no respect is shown to the human form !"

Another time having had to submit to incarceration, of which he had a perfectly childish horror, he made up his mind to do his duty as *Garde National*, and appeared to take his place in a company, attired in light pantaloons, yellow spotted vest, frock coat with gold buttons, rose-coloured tie, his long hair floating under a policeman's helmet, and an ancient musket in his hand, which he had borrowed from an artist's studio. His comrades greeted

this strange appearance with convulsions of laughter, but he was recommended not to indulge in any more such pleasantries.

Gautier's first novel—he was only twenty-four when it was published—did not add much to his popularity or his reputation, except in so far as it was everywhere criticised, condemned, and read.

He had attempted to idealise an extraordinary being, half-soldier, half-syren—above all virago. She sometimes appeared as a veritable swashbuckler—sometimes a beautiful woman; a figure, it was said, which could only have existed in the most disordered imagination; but as a matter of fact, a real Mademoiselle de Maupin did positively exist in the reign of Louis Quinze, who fought duels, made her *début* at the opera, and played no inconsiderable part in politics, whether as man or woman was never known.

Le Capitaine Fracasse dated in the author's brain from about the same time as *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, but was not continued, modified, and finished till much later, when he was asked to write a novel for the *Revue National*. It had been spoken of to many of his friends, who all agreed that it promised to be the best of his productions. Feydeau in his 'Souvenirs intimes' relates that he found him one day seated before a table covered with scraps of paper, and with an air of serious application quite unusual with him.

"*Que de copie, Théo?*" was his remark, and Gautier, gathering up the scattered leaves, replied—

"It is *Capitaine Fracasse*. I will read you a chapter."

It was headed, "*Le Château de la Misère*."

"If that is your idea, it is not very festive," said Feydeau.

"Wait a minute"—and the author began a second chapter more dolorous still.

"Oh, Théo! why are you so sad?" asked Feydeau.

Gautier dropped his head upon his hands, and said—

"Because I live."

It was no wonder that gloomy views of life haunted a man who seemed marked out for crosses and disappointment. One of the bitterest of these was his exclusion from the Academy; his proper place was among the Forty, yet less distinguished men were preferred before him. He acknowledged that it was a weakness to feel it so acutely, and that as both Balzac and Dumas were treated with the same neglect, he had no right to complain.

"*Mais que veux tu?*" he would say; "*on n'est pas parfait!*"

His interest in almost every subject, except those on which the chief part of his time was spent; his love of Nature more

especially, led to his being compared to the great poet of Germany.

The observation made him smile, and he said, "Alas ! there has always been one thing wanting to make me resemble Goethe."

"And what is that ?"

"*The Duke of Weimar !*"

Whenever he was able to get away from the work which oppressed him, he used to set as great a distance as time allowed between himself and Paris.

The unusual feeling of emancipation put a vigour and originality into his books of travel which will obtain for them a longer life than productions which he regarded as more noteworthy.

In 1850, obtaining a long holiday, he started for Italy with Louis de Cormenin—one of the romanticists—the favourite friend of all—a poet who had never penned a line, or rather who had never published one, for he used to throw his verses into a drawer, and when it got full, would empty it into the fire, saying he had paid his debt to the Muses.

Both were dreamers—idealists—true lovers of art. They passed two delightful months at Venice, where Gautier collected materials for his 'Italia' with the most scrupulous care and accuracy.

It was only the things he saw that he reproduced, avoiding all pedantry, rather to the surprise of his companion, who expected him to show signs of the erudition he possessed. No technical word was employed, although the architectural lore Victor Hugo had brought into fashion was dear to the heart of the romanticist.

It was St. Amant who wrote, "The description of small things is my especial prerogative ; upon these I employ all my little industry." But the boast belongs of greater right to Gautier, whose "little industry" was of no little importance to French literature, introducing as it did a novel style of descriptive writing.

He banished all rhetorical flights, never embellished, never moralised. The scenes he visited appeared before the eyes of his readers as they had appeared to his own, and were transmitted with extraordinary precision.

To visit the imperial river after reading Victor Hugo's 'Le Rhin' is to prepare for disappointment. So much magnificence of pictorial imagery must have the effect of dwarfing the reality ; but with Gautier it is not so. His reveries, however poetical, never obscured his judgment, or the strong sense of equity which was a part of himself. He describes a little palace at Venice, on the Grand Canal, where he would have liked to spend the rest

of his days. "There is between two tall buildings a delicious palazzino composed of a window and a balcony ; but what a window, and what a balcony !" The reader needs no lengthier description.

During the last days of the Second Empire, Gautier would seem to have conquered evil fortune. It was not, certainly, that M. Rouher found time in the midst of absorbing interests to occupy himself with literary men and matters, and like Richelieu to discuss with poets the value of a word or the propriety of a rhyme ; but those in high authority began to understand and appreciate the hard and conscientious work which had so long oppressed him.

He was well paid for his articles in the *Journal Officiel*, and obtained the post of librarian to the highly-cultured Princesse Mathilde. It was said that he received a pension from the Emperor.

He was given the Cross of the Legion of Honour ; but then came the Revolution of 1870, plunging him back into a sea of troubles.

The siege of Paris, during which he suffered terrible privations, told upon a frame already enfeebled by forty years of incessant brain work.

Every detail of the war was hateful to him, he had no sympathy for either side, and declared that whatever political considerations had determined France and Prussia to disturb the peace of nations, he could only consider the position as false and barbarous.

"If we are conquered," he said, "the darkness thickens ; and if we conquer, what do we gain ? We live in the nineteenth century, and are going back to Gengis Khan."

Maxime Du Camp relates that Gautier one day in conversation went over the events of his life.

It was a *miserere*.

He could remember only two intervals of happiness : his journey through Spain, and the two months in Venice with Louis de Cormenin.

He described himself as a dreamer lost in the midst of a world which had trodden him down, and the only thing his friends said—the only thing that all who knew him said—was, *pauvre Théo !*

Snow-Blanche.

A RUSSIAN TALE.*

THE man's name was Ivan, that of his wife Marie: they were old people and had no children, which was a source of great affliction to both. Their only consolation was to admire and caress the children of others. What could they do? Nothing. God had so willed it: and the affairs of this world are not controlled by us, but by God.

One winter's day the snow was lying knee-deep. Some children were playing in the street, and the two old people were watching them from the window. The little ones were trying to fashion, by help of the snow, the image of a woman. Ivan and Marie looked on, silent and pensive. Suddenly Ivan smiled, saying :

“ Wife, let us also amuse ourselves by manufacturing a woman out of snow.”

“ Why should we not?” answered Marie, good-humouredly. “ But, instead of a woman, let us make a child, a little girl. We have not been blessed with a real child, so I suppose we must be satisfied with an artificial one.”

“ You are right,” replied Ivan, laughing.

And picking up his cap, he went out into the garden with his wife. Then, they began to model a sort of doll: first, they made a tiny body, then tiny hands and feet. At the top, they placed a ball of snow to represent the head.

“ May God assist you!” said a passer-by.

“ Many thanks,” returned Ivan.

“ The help of God is always of advantage,” added Marie.

“ What are you doing there?” asked the stranger.

“ Can't you see? we are making a snow-child.”

They had now modelled the nose and chin: two holes repre-

* Related to the author by a peasant in the neighbourhood of Nishni-Novgorod.

sented the eyes, and Ivan had drawn two lines indicating the shape of the lips. Hardly had he finished, than he felt a puff of warm breath on his hand. He drew back precipitately. On again approaching, he saw that the eyes had assumed a concave shape and were glistening with the light of life: the lips suddenly reddened, then parted in a sweet, winning smile.

"Good heavens! what is this?" he cried. "Is it a manifestation of divine power, or is it witchcraft?"

The child bent its head, and moved its little arms and legs in the snow, like a human being.

"Oh, Ivan, Ivan!" exclaimed Marie; "God has at last sent us a child."

And she rushed to Snow-Blanche (for so she at once named her) and covered her with kisses. Then the snow peeled from the child's body like the skin from an orange; and a little girl, throwing herself into the peasant woman's arms, warmly returned her caresses.

"Ah! Snow-Blanche, dear Snow-Blanche!" repeated the old woman, as she hurried her newly-found treasure into the house.

Ivan could scarcely recover from his surprise; his wife was almost beside herself with joy. Snow-Blanche grew more and more beautiful—not daily but hourly. Ivan and Marie could scarcely credit their senses. Contentment reigned throughout the household. The young girls of the village, who frequently visited the old couple, never grew tired of chatting and playing with Snow-Blanche, she was so pretty, amiable, docile and intelligent.

In the course of the winter she grew so rapidly as to appear a girl of fifteen instead of a mere child; and her voice was so softly harmonious that every one who heard it was charmed. Moreover, she was good, obedient, and attentive. Her complexion was as white as the snow which had given her birth; her eyes were the colour of the *Vergissmeinnicht*; her hair was yellow as gold, and was so long that it reached her knees. But her face, of a perfect dead white, without a particle of colour, would have made one believe she had no blood in her veins; yet she was so good-tempered and amiable that every one loved her.

"You see, Ivan," the old woman would repeat over and over again, "God has at length sent us joy instead of sorrow. Our troubles are ended."

"By the will of God," invariably answered her husband; "nothing in this world is everlasting, neither joy nor sorrow."

The winter passed away, the bright sun of early spring shone merrily in the heavens, warming the earth and its inhabitants;

the grass in the fields and meadows assumed a brighter green; the lark began to pour forth his joyous song, and the village maidens, assembling in the evening, sang in unison:

"Sweet spring! hast thou come, sweet spring,
New life and joy to our hearts to bring?"

But Snow-Blanche had of late become silent and melancholy.

"What ails thee, dear child?" repeatedly questioned Marie. "Art thou unwell? Has any one done aught to cause thee grief? Why dost thou look so downcast and sorrowful?"

"No, it is nothing, mother. I am quite well."

The last vestige of the winter snows soon disappeared beneath the sun's warm rays; gardens and meadows were resplendent with flowers, birds carolled merrily, the whole world seemed livelier and happier. But Snow-Blanche grew more and more silent and sad: she avoided her companions, sought the shadiest parts of the woods, hiding amongst the trees like a lily of the valley. She was especially fond of wandering on the borders of lakes overshadowed by weeping willows; and, stranger than all, delighted in walking through the pouring rain. During violent storms she would regain a portion of her former cheerfulness, amusing herself by collecting the hailstones, as eagerly as if they were pearls. As soon as the sunshine reappeared and the hail had melted, she would weep bitterly, as if mourning the death of a beloved friend. Spring soon passed away, and summer reigned in all its splendour. The village maidens were accustomed each day to spend several hours in the woods, and always called to fetch Snow-Blanche, whom they insisted on taking with them, notwithstanding Marie's unwillingness to let her go. The peasant woman was afraid some mishap might befall her beloved child, and ever, on reluctantly granting the required permission, would impress upon the young girl's companions the necessity of taking the greatest care of her.

"Do not forget," she would say, "that I love this child as a mother never loved child before. Therefore, be careful of her and keep her out of danger."

One bright summer's day they called as usual, and Marie gave her consent even more reluctantly than of wont. But Snow-Blanche looked so sad and dejected, that at last she yielded, thinking that the fresh air and exercise might do her good. With her own hands she gave the finishing touches to her daughter's dress, and bade her go. The troop of merry girls hastened to the wood, where they passed the day pleasantly enough. Towards evening

they lit a bonfire with dry leaves: then they placed themselves in a line, each one with a wreath of flowers on her head. Snow-Blanche was the last.

“Now we are going to run,” they said to her, “and mind—you must run after us.” Then all clapped their hands, laughing, and skipped one by one through the fire.

Suddenly they turned round: a strange sound, like a deep sigh or low groan, had startled them. One of the young girls remarked that Snow-Blanche was missing.

“Oh, she is hiding for fun!” said another.

They search everywhere, but cannot find her. Alarmed, they disperse in every direction, vainly calling her by name over and over again! They marvel what can have become of her. Perhaps she had returned home: and they go back to the village, but nothing had been seen or heard of Snow-Blanche. The next day and the day after the search was renewed; but still in vain. Every part of the surrounding country was explored, even to each bush and thicket; but still no tidings of Snow-Blanche could be obtained. Marie and Ivan were in despair; nothing could assuage their grief, especially that of the old peasant woman. She wandered every day through the woods, calling out at intervals her beloved daughter’s name, and fancied more than once that her cries were answered. But it always turned out to be a delusion. What could have become of Snow-Blanche? Had a wild beast dragged her into the depths of the forest, or had some huge bird of prey carried her off towards the broad expanse of the distant ocean? No; such had not been the fate of the snow-maiden. The young girl, running in pursuit of her companions through the flames they had kindled in jest, dissolved into thin vapour, which, rising through the blue ether, ascended into the heavens.

Guy de Maupassant.

I.

THE death of M. Guy de Maupassant, at the early age of forty-three, came as no sorrowful surprise to the readers who had derived pleasure or profit from his marvellous style and pathological psychology. It was not the cutting short of a life of work in its maturity, but rather the flickering out of a candle that had already burnt down to the socket. As is well known, M. de Maupassant's mind gave way more than two years ago, and after a brief period of seclusion it became apparent that it was quite hopeless to look for any improvement in its condition.

Like Swift, Maupassant was fated to "die at top," although, unlike the Dean of St. Patrick's, he does not seem to have ever been conscious of his unhappy fate. There is a pathetic story told of his later days, which has some appearance of truth about it. The great novelist took the fancy that his exquisite tales were personified in the butterflies that the summer weather brought to flutter about him, and his chief pleasure was gained from sitting quietly all day long to watch their dance and progress through the sunshine. Readers of 'Q.' will remember a somewhat analogous illusion in one of the tales in 'Noughts and Crosses.' There it is his wife's soul that the hero believes to have returned to him in the form of a butterfly. Mr. Quiller-Couch used the same idea again, in perhaps the best poem in his recent book of verses :—

"The light above the poet's head
 Streamed on the page and on the cloth,
 And twice and thrice there buffeted
 On the black pane a white-winged moth.
 'Twas Annie's soul that beat outside,
 And 'Open, open, open!' cried."

Maupassant had no wife, even of the Thirteenth Arrondissement, to share his heart with the Art which he served so faithfully, and

it is not wonderful that the illusion which attacks other men through their human love should have attacked him through his literary sensibilities. Butterflies, indeed, seem hardly appropriate to many of the grim and powerful studies in psychology, for which he had so rare a talent. Death's-head moths and strange tropical beetles with metallic and iridescent wings were more in keeping, such as gather dust in the collections of dead and gone entomologists.

Now the fitful fever of his life is over, and the curtain has fallen on the tragedy which began with so much hope. Maupassant is far from being the only writer of great promise or great performance whose brain has given way under the stress of life or thought. There are many instances in all literature which go to confirm the doctrine of the Italian physiologists, headed by Dr. Lombroso, of Turin, who give a scientific statement to Dryden's paradoxical alliance of genius to madness. Swift and Cowper, Kit Smart and Collins, to go no further than the last century of our own literature, are all more or less examples of the same thing. But in the case of Maupassant the study should be an especially interesting one to those who care for the psychology of disease. A careful student of his works might have seen the madness that finally wrecked him slowly creeping up in the horizon. Many of the extraordinary studies of incipient or latent insanity, which we have amongst his thirty volumes, and whose remarkable verisimilitude and persuasiveness were, like the word *politic*, "surprising by himself," have now a painful light thrown upon their genesis. It was from his own inner consciousness that Maupassant evolved such studies of madness as 'Lui,' or 'Le Horla,' or 'Qui Sait?' or, perhaps the most noteworthy of all, 'Suicides.' This last sketch deserves further attention, especially as it links itself with what will, by future readers, be considered one of the most characteristic of Maupassant's works, 'Sur l'Eau.'

In 'Suicides' we have the masterly analysis of the mental state of a man who kills himself through sheer weariness of life. "Aged fifty-seven," says the newspaper report, "M. X. had a comfortable income and possessed all that makes life worth living." Maupassant gives us the last thoughts of the suicide, in the form of a letter written whilst the loaded revolver lay on the table. It reveals none of the great disasters or sorrows that we usually look for as the cause of suicide; but it shows, he says, "the slow succession of life's tiny annoyances, the fatal disorganisation of a solitary existence, from which all illusions have disappeared. It explains those tragic deaths which only sensitive and highly-organised persons will understand." It is simply the

confession of a man who has lost his illusions, and who finds life unendurable for its monotony. With the old writer, he agrees that a man may kill himself for very weariness of doing the same thing day after day.

"Once," he says, "once I enjoyed life. Everything amused me, the faces of passing women, the bustle of the streets, my own dwelling. I even took an interest in the cut of my clothes. But the repetition of the same visions has at length filled my soul with weariness, as might happen to a spectator forced to behold the same play every night of his life. Daily I rise at an hour that has been the same for thirty years; for thirty years I have eaten the same dishes in the same restaurant; only the waiter was ever changed. I have tried travel. The isolation of strange places filled me with terror. I felt so alone in the world, so unimportant, that I straightway took the homeward road. But there the unchanged appearance of my furniture that has not varied for thirty years, my worn armchairs that I remember when they were new, the very odour of my rooms (for every dwelling in the course of years acquires a special odour of its own) every evening gave me fresh disgust for my established habits and filled me with dark melancholy at the thought of such a life. Everything repeats itself unceasingly, terribly. . . . Every day when I shave, I feel an immense longing to cut my throat. The monotonous face that I behold daily in my little mirror, with its soaped cheeks, has more than once brought tears of anguish to my eyes."

This is one mood with which M. de Maupassant was undoubtedly well acquainted himself.

Another, and an even less healthy mood, is that of the man who suffers from the terror of the unknown—the *au-delà*—which oppresses us all at times. In 'Lui' we have the obsession of a man on the verge of madness by a ghostly form, whose peculiar horror is that it never lingers long enough to let its victim perceive it clearly. When it leaves him free, he says—

"It is there all the same in my imagination. Though it is invisible, it is there all the same. It lies in wait for me behind doors, in locked cupboards, under my bed, in every dark corner and every shadow. If I throw the door wide, if I open the cupboard, if I pass my light under the bed, it is there no longer. But then I feel it behind me. I turn round, yet am certain that I shall not see it, that I shall see it no more. None the less is it still behind me."

"Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread :"

—Such is the fate of those who tamper with these visions of the night. Such, it is feared, was Maupassant's fate. His madness

is perhaps to be attributed to this pestilential habit of morbid analysis, as much as to the pressure of work and fast-living, which is said to have contributed to it. Like the man in Mr. Kipling's powerful story, "this that was my master has descended into the Dark Places, and there has been caught, because he was not able to escape with sufficient speed." But O, the pity of it!

In 'Sur l'Eau,' which is the record of a yachting voyage in the Mediterranean that M. de Maupassant took in the yacht, the *Bel-Ami*, called after and bought with the proceeds of his first successful novel, we have the vivid description of one of the sleepless nights that were the penalty of his overwork. This again bears witness to that terrible habit of morbid analysis, the dissection of the pathologist, from which Maupassant never could free himself. The virtue which he had acquired for the sake of Art became the vice and curse of his leisure human moments. As he lay awake in his hammock, floating evenly upon the tideless sea, the steady groaning of a chafing pulley set his thoughts to its tune.

“It was the voice that cries in our souls without ceasing, darkly and mournfully, that tortures and harasses us, unknown and not to be quieted, unforgettable and cruel; the voice that reproaches us at once with all we have done and all we have left undone; the voice of vague remorse, of unavailing regret, of the days that are past, of the ~~women~~ men we have met and left that might have loved us, of vanished deeds, vain joys, perished hopes; the voice of all that passes, of all that flies, deceives us, disappears, the voice of what we have failed to attain, of what we never shall attain; the still small voice that sobs out the failure of life, the uselessness of struggle, the powerlessness of the spirit and the weakness of the flesh.”

This is a terrible yet simple description of what we have all felt at some midnight hour or other, when the grasshopper was a burden. But the wisest man is he who flies from the contemplation of it, and soothes himself to health by fresh air and hard physical exercise. Maupassant nursed the feeling. “I have desired all, and enjoyed nothing,” he cries mournfully, as if aware of his self-torture.

“I bear in myself that second sight which is at once the strength and the weakness of an artist. I write because I understand and suffer with all that exists, because I know it too well, and above all because, without being able to enjoy life, I see it within myself, in the mirror of my thought.”

Like the Lady of Shalott, who was doomed to see all life only in her magic glass, Maupassant lived in a world of his own creation apart from humanity; and the contemplation of the

baseness and stupidity of the beings that he chose to people it finally drove him mad. It is true that the scene from which I have quoted ends in the ether-bottle ; and that, with its vicious circle of increasing insomnia, yielding only to increasing doses, had a great part in the final catastrophe. But this pessimism and morbidity of mind was the chief factor.

II.

THERE is one especial cause for Maupassant's habitual gloom of pessimism that I do not remember to have seen dwelt upon by the critics. This was his youthful experience of that terrible war of 1870. He was just on the verge of twenty when it broke out, and followed the traditions of his noble Norman house by shoulerding a Chassepot and taking his place in the ranks of France. He went through almost the whole campaign, and many of his finest stories are founded upon his personal experiences in that shameful and disastrous downfall. The *débâcle* also left, I believe, other traces upon his nature in the gloomy views of life and humanity from which he was never able to free himself. When the story of his life comes to be written by a person who possesses the requisite knowledge, we shall no doubt learn how far his family history and his personal idiosyncrasy contributed to them. That he had a very real horror of war is apparent to all who know his work, and in more than one masterpiece he has quietly enforced the reader to share it.

Take, for instance, the simple tragedy of 'Deux Amis,' the tale of the two Parisians who slip out during the siege for a day's fishing, are caught by a Prussian outpost, refuse to give up the password, and are promptly shot, while their judge and executioner, with a very characteristic touch, orders a soldier to fry the dead men's catch of fish for his lunch—"ce sera délicieux!" When the two men, at their fishing in the midst of the circles of circumvallation, hear the guns of Paris begin to fire again behind them, one of them is "seized with the anger of a peaceful man at these madmen who slay each other, and he growls, 'Faut-il être stupide pour se tuer comme ça!'" His friend replies, 'C'est pis que des bêtes!'" Worse than beasts—that is perhaps the moral to which most of Maupassant's war-stories tend. Of all animals, the human is the most detestable, when he takes to the blood-fury.

"Meanwhile the cannon of Mont Valérien were thundering overhead, raining destruction on Frenchmen's houses, crushing out the lives of human beings, putting ends to many a dream and many a hope, and

opening wounds, never to be healed, in the bosoms of wives, mothers and daughters in that other land far away. ‘*C'est la vie*,’ philosophically observed M. Sauvage. ‘*Dites plutôt que c'est la mort*,’ said his companion.”

The same thought is brought out even more strongly in the later story of ‘*Les Rois*,’ one of the most powerful pieces of work that Maupassant has left. This story is related by the Comte de Garens. During the war it fell to him, then quartermaster in a Hussar regiment, to spend Twelfth Night on outpost duty in a deserted village. With a squadron of ten troopers, all, as it happens, volunteers and men of good birth like himself, he takes up his quarters in a deserted house, where they succeed in finding poultry and wine enough to make a good Twelfth Night supper—the “*Souper des Rois*” that is as dear to a Frenchman as his Christmas dinner to a Briton. The fire on which the goose is roasted is fed with the fragments of the house-owner’s landau: such are the details of war. The only thing wanting is a few ladies to grace the feast. All the inhabitants of the village have fled. But the Comte, spurred on by a wager, prevails on the Curé to come to supper and bring some “real women” with him. They turn out to be a Little Sister from the adjoining convent, with three of her poor old charges: *la Mère Paumelle*, a dropsical old woman; *la Mère Jean-Jean*, all but paralytic; and *la Putois*, an imbecile dwarf. The Hussars make them as welcome as if they were princesses, and the supper is a very gay one, thanks to the goose and champagne, and the good humour of the whole party. Of a sudden a shot is heard. The supper is broken up, the soldiers get to horse; but speedily the alarm is quieted, it is only an old peasant who has been shot by a sentinel to whose challenge he paid no heed. The peasant is brought into the dining-room on a litter.

“They laid him down on the mattress which had been made ready for him. A single glance told me” (goes on M. le Comte) “that he was dying. He drew his breath with gasps, and with every breath came blood that oozed from the corner of his lips. The poor wretch was perfectly covered with it. Face, beard, hair, neck, clothes, all seemed as if they had been dyed in some crimson vat. The blood was dried upon him, clotted and mingled with mud, so that he was horrible to look upon.

“The old man was wrapped in a long shepherd’s mantle, and occasionally opened his dull, dying eyes, void of speculation, that seemed full of dumb amazement, like those of the creatures that a sportsman kills, and which gaze at him, as they drop at his feet, all but dead, with a dying look of surprise and terror.

“The Curé cried, ‘Alas! it is Père Placide, the old shepherd from les Moulins. The poor old creature is stone deaf, and cannot have heard your challenge. Ah, mon Dieu! You have murdered this wretched man!’

"The little Sister had opened the dying man's blouse and shirt, and we saw a tiny violet hole, that scarcely bled at all, in the middle of his breast. 'We can do nothing,' she said. The shepherd, who was struggling terribly for breath, pumped up blood with every expiration, and in his throat and lungs we could hear a sinister and continuous rattle.

"Standing above him, the priest raised his right hand, made the sign of the cross, and in a slow and solemn voice pronounced the Latin words that have power to cleanse the soul. Before he had well finished, a short shiver ran through the old man's frame, as if some spring had broken within him. The laboured breathing stopped. He was dead.

"Turning round, I beheld a scene more terrible than the death-agony of this poor wretch. The three old women, standing squeezed against each other in a corner, were hideous statues of anguish and horror. I made a step towards them, and all began to utter pitiful cries, trying to escape, as if I were going to kill them also. La Jean-Jean, whose paralytic limb refused to support her, fell at full length on the ground.

"The little Sister, leaving her care of the dead man, hastened to her charges, and, without so much as giving me a word or a look, wrapped them in their shawls, gave them their crutches, bundled them out at the door, and disappeared with them into the wide black night. I perceived that I must not offer them even the escort of a single trooper, for the mere clink of a sabre would have driven them frantic.

"Meanwhile, the priest stood looking at the dead man. Finally, turning to me, he said, 'What a horrible thing is war!'"

That last sentence is the key-note of a great deal of Maupassant's work: perhaps, also, the secret of the gloom in which his mind always lay. In 'Sur l'Eau,' the book that I have already quoted, he expressed himself even more clearly. Moltke, that skilful artist in war, once declared that "war hinders the nations from sinking into the most hideous materialism."

"Yes," said Maupassant; "we contend with nature and ignorance, with every kind of obstacle, in the hope of making our short life easier. Philanthropists and men of science spend their lives, toiling in the search for all that can help their poor brethren and lighten their burdens. . . . War breaks out. In six months the generals have destroyed the work of the patience and the genius of twenty years. This is what you call hindering a nation from sinking into the most hideous materialism! I have seen this war that you boast of. I have seen men, fallen back into brutes, beside themselves, slaying for mere pleasure, for fear, in bravado or in ostentation. Then, when right exists no longer, when law is dead, when all idea of justice disappears, have I seen innocent men taken on a high-road, suspected and shot because they were afraid. I have seen dogs shot where they were chained at their masters' doors for the sake of trying a new revolver. I have seen cattle shot where they lay in the field in the most purposeless way, merely for the sake of firing at something, as a good jest. This is what you call hindering a nation from sinking into the most hideous materialism!"

To invade a country, to slaughter the peaceful inhabitants who dare to defend their homes, to burn the house over the head of a

starving man whose food you have stolen; to break all the furniture that is not looted, to devour the people's food, drink their wine, outrage their women, to leave in your track famine and pestilence——these are the benefits of war, as Maupassant had seen them with his own eyes. It is little wonder that he came out of that disastrous campaign a confirmed pessimist. The lesson which his peculiarly keen power of observation had impressed on a young and thoughtful mind was never effaced. Not one of his war-stories but repeats this lesson of the horrors and wastefulness of war. Even 'Mademoiselle Fifi,' with its touching moral of patriotism found in the last bosom where you would expect it, reiterates the same teaching. And during all his eleven years of production, Maupassant never ceased to enlarge upon the text, "*Nous sommes des bêtes, nous resterons des bêtes que l'instinct domine et que rien ne change.*"

III.

WHAT will be the judgment of posterity upon the work of Maupassant? It is difficult to say. It is always hard to pronounce a just and balanced verdict upon the work of a contemporary. In the case of M. de Maupassant the task is rendered doubly hard by the fact that he is one of the chief representatives of a "school" (as the phrase is) which has given rise to more doubt among the critics than, perhaps, any literary fashion of modern times. Mr. Saintsbury bans the "Naturalists" altogether, but allows that M. de Maupassant is the most gifted writer in prose and verse that has appeared in France in the last dozen years. M. Zola goes further. In the speech which it naturally fell to him to make at his colleague's grave, he even went so far as to rank Maupassant's work beside that of Rabelais and Molière, La Fontaine and Montaigne. No higher praise could be awarded to any French writer; there is little need to say that it is considerably exaggerated by the natural enthusiasm of the head of a literary school for the most brilliant of his colleagues. Posterity will certainly not place Monsieur Parent and Georges Duroy, Maître Chicot and Madame Oreille anywhere near Panurge and Chrysale, Sganarelle or Frère Jan. These are of the Immortals; it is rash to say as much of any of Maupassant's creations. Yet, in one respect at least, his claim to a high place, if not among the highest, cannot well be ignored. His style was one of the most perfect that has ever been written; not Merimée, not Gautier is more consummate an artist. Its development is

worthy of note, for it affords one of the best instances on record of the training of a great writer.

Nature began by endowing the young Norman with a faculty of observation that has hardly ever been surpassed. Maupassant had an eye for human character, especially for the baser and more worthless parts of it, which can only be compared to that of Darwin for earthworms or Bates for strange plants. To what account he turned this faculty in the war and elsewhere every reader of his wonderful short stories knows. The excellence of his style is due as much to assiduous and well-directed training as to any natural aptitude. In the preface to 'Pierre et Jean,' a document which every novelist may be recommended to study, Maupassant, after laying down his views upon his Art, proceeds to certain autobiographical details of extreme interest. He modestly classes himself among the *travailleurs conscients et tenaces*, rather than among so-called "men of genius." He ascribes his success in the *métier* to two men: Louis Bouilhet and Gustave Flaubert. Bouilhet, who will rest his claims to English reputation chiefly upon this connection, taught him the useful lesson that "a hundred lines, or less, are enough to make an artist's reputation, if they are perfect ones." As M. Zola put it the other day, "an accumulation of many volumes is very heavy luggage for glory, and man's memory cares not to burden itself with such a weight. It will rather favour a story of three hundred lines, that students of literature will yet pass on to one another as an unimpeachable example of classical perfection."

After that, the young aspirant to letters had the good luck to come under the influence of the author of 'Madame Bovary.' Flaubert is said to have been in the habit of boasting that one of his most original creations would prove to be 'Guy de Maupassant,' and although he did not live to see his pupil's fame, he would have been satisfied with it. When Maupassant, about 1873, ventured to submit his earliest attempts to the great writer's notice, Flaubert saw promise in them and undertook the task of making a writer of the young amateur, with whom he was closely connected by affection, if not by blood. Flaubert was a hard preceptor, and fond of declaring with Buffon that "*le talent n'est qu'une longue patience*"—genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains. "For seven years," said Maupassant, "I worked hard, making verses, tales, novels, even an execrable drama. Nothing survives. The Master read all I wrote, and unfolded his criticism upon it at breakfast every Sunday. He gradually implanted in me the two or three essential principles."

“Le talent est une longue patience. The business is to observe every-thing that you wish to express sufficiently long and attentively to find an aspect of it that no one has yet seen or described. Everything contains an undiscovered principle, because we are in the habit of only using our eyes with the recollection of what others have thought of the thing we are examining. The question is to find this unknown element. In order to describe a blazing fire or a solitary tree, we must examine the tree or the fire until, to us, they no longer resemble any other tree or fire.”

Having thus laid down the principle upon which “originality” depends, Flaubert set his pupil exercises.

“When you pass a grocer at his shop-door,” he said, “a concierge smoking his pipe, or a cab-stand, show me the grocer or the concierge in your description, with their attitude and their physical appearance. Indicate also their especial mental qualities, in such a way that I can never mistake them for any other grocer or concierge; describe to me, with a single phrase, wherein a cab-horse differs from the fifty that precede and follow it.”

This is the theory of observation of Flaubert and Maupassant; and the theory of style is like unto it.

“Whatever the thing is that you wish to speak of, there is but one word to express the idea of it, one verb to use with it and one epithet to qualify it. We must search diligently for these inevitable words until we find them, never being content to evade the difficulty by any trick of language or *tour de force*, however happy.”

It is clear that with such theories and such an eye behind them a writer might go far.

Most of us, *pace* Mr. Saintsbury, will agree that he did go far. Paulette d'Alaly, the delightful and erratic heroine of “Gyp's” most popular work, declares that the authors whom she prefers are Daudet, Maupassant, Zola, somewhat to the scandal of the amiable lawyer who puts the question. The critical estimate of the French novelists since the fall of the Second Empire will not be very different from this. Of the three, I have heard it doubted whether Maupassant did not possess the greatest genius, as he certainly owned by far the most perfect style. It has been gravely debated recently whether any of his work will last for fifty years. This is undoubtedly one of the matters that lie, as a Greek would say, on the knees of the gods. It is true that much of his work is slight, some dull, much (one admits it with a blush) unfitted for boarding-schools, much even pestilent. But it seems to me that some at least of his work, say about a tenth, will survive as long as anything modern. ‘Une Vie,’ which has been solemnly anathematised as “pessimistic lubricity,” and was

too much for even the Paris bookstalls, 'Bel Ami,' with the singularly unpleasing young gentleman who serves as hero, and all the long novels but one, or perhaps two, I yield to the enemy. 'Notre Cœur' is as brilliant a piece of morbid psychological analysis as I know, but it certainly is not pleasant. But 'Pierre et Jean' is more than pleasant; it is great work. The movement is more open, the air larger, the motive less risky than we are accustomed to in Maupassant's work. The preface, to which I have already referred, is as important a document to the student of the modern Realists as the preface of 'Mademoiselle de Maupin' is to the student of the men of 1830. Besides this story, some two volumes that might be collected from M. de Maupassant's short stories will hardly be allowed to die. Such a collection would be among the treasures of the book-lover who cares for style; it would, though this may seem a hard saying, contain hardly a line that could bring a blush to the cheek of the young person. It is true that Maupassant has done work as audacious as anything modern; yet at his best he is seldom over the particular line that we set as a boundary to our writers. The country that accepts 'Tess' would hardly decline 'L'Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme.' The story which narrates the lonely old age of Monsieur Parent, the grim fantasies of 'Lui' and 'Qui Sait?' the heart-moving tale of 'Le Gueux,' rural studies like 'La Ficelle' and 'Le Vieux,' with a dozen more of the short stories in which Maupassant is unsurpassed since Merimée and Gautier, ought to live. They are at least as good as 'Une Page d'Amour' or 'Le Nabab,' even if it be heresy to compare them to 'Germinal' or the immortal Tartarin himself.

The one obstacle that rested in the way of Maupassant's supremacy was his view of life. He was as far as possible from deserving the praise due to him "who saw life steadily and saw it whole." An inscription which a previous owner has pencilled in my copy of 'Les Sœurs Rondoli' goes somewhat crudely to the root of one of his special weaknesses. "His notion seems to be 'no illusion'; and he seeks to break down the last illusion of men and poets—the first and last illusion—the illusion of woman—*Das Ewig Weibliche*. He will not be *hinangezicht*." This explains some of his most unpleasing tendencies. At the same time we must remember Flaubert's remark, that "avec la théorie des tendances on va loin," and take into account the extent to which Maupassant's nature was warped by his war experiences and his overwork.

The fact remains that his view of human nature was an utterly distorted one. On all hands he only saw the cruelty, the

bestiality, above all, the ineffable stupidity of mankind. We hardly find one man or woman in his books who illustrates the nobler side of life. "*Dieu ! que les hommes sont laids !*" is his favourite theme; of all animals the human animal is the most detestable. Something of Swift's *sæva indignatio* seems to have possessed Maupassant, and in consequence some of his creations are as repulsive as the Yahoos. "What to me is this quintessence of dust ?" we find him continually asking. The question is, perhaps, a wholesome corrective to what some one calls "sloppy optimism"; but it is not thus that the greatest writers have regarded life. Not Balzac nor Thackeray, not even Daudet nor Zola. Thus it is that Maupassant is fatally excluded from the company of the greatest. It is not his to come "where Orpheus and where Homer are;" but he will, I think, always be read by the lovers of consummate style, and of keen insight into the very dusty chambers of the heart.

W. E. GARRETT FISHER.

The Crew of the Flying Dutchman.

I.

On a bright summer day in the year of grace sixteen hundred and sixty-two the Reverend Richard Waddilove, A.M., Vicar of Bridlington Keye, was enjoying his mid-day meal, when his serving-girl brought him word that Reuben Oram wished to speak with him.

“Bid him come in, Letty,” said the worthy clergyman, who was busily engaged with the breast of a chicken, provided by some thoughtful parishioner.

“Your pardon, Parson,” said the new-comer, hesitating on the threshold.

“Come in, Reuben, come in. The clergy need to eat and drink as well as the laity—and I for one don’t attempt to disguise it.”

The Vicar’s heavy paunch and rubicund nose bore evidence to the truth of his assertion.

“Take a seat, Reuben,” the clergyman went on. “They tell me you have been across to the Low Countries. How did you find the Hollanders? Are they rearing a second Van Tromp to sweep us off the seas?”

As there was no answer, the Vicar put down the tankard he was raising to his lips and looked at his visitor. Only then did he note his troubled appearance. In the past Oram had been as cheery and hearty in his manner as his fellows, but now he sat with care and anxiety written on every feature, and nervousness in each movement.

“What ails you, Reuben?” asked the Vicar kindly. “Are you in trouble?”

But the sailor sat there twirling his cap and shuffling his feet. His lips moved, but no words came.

“Tut, tut, man. Tell me all about it. Is the wife ill, or the bairns?”

“No, your worship. Would to God it were no worse than that.”

"I am not married myself, Reuben Oram," said the clergyman gravely, "but your words sound somewhat unkindly."

"Parson," cried Oram, springing to his feet and walking to and fro like a caged animal—"Parson, I don't know what I am saying. I don't know what I am doing. All I know is that I am damned—damned till the Day of Judgment, and after maybe."

Parson Waddilove rose in his turn to his feet. He put his hands on the shoulders of the other and looked quietly into his face. There was a great pity in his little ferret eyes.

"Sit down, Reuben. Damned most of us deserve to be, but God is merciful unto all men. Your sin must be great indeed if He cannot pardon you. What have you done?"

"Nothing that could deserve punishment such as mine. Parson, is there no hope for me?"

"Surely, lad, there is hope for the worst of us. But tell me what troubles you, and it may be that I can ease your mind."

"Would that were possible, sir! But listen, and you may judge."

"One minute, lad. October ale hath many uses. At a pinch it is of service as a poultice; but when a man has a tale to tell its value increases ten-fold. Drink, man," and Parson Waddilove reached him the tankard he himself had intended to drain.

Oram took a long pull, and then with firmer voice began:—

"It all happened long ago, Parson—fifteen years ago at least—five before I settled here. It was my last long voyage. Vanderdecken was owner and skipper. Wind and weather were with us. We had a quick run out to the eastern seas, and for once in a way the captain seemed passably well pleased with things. The cargo was bartered to some advantage, and we were returning with a rich store of elephant's teeth, camphor, gum, and wax; and it was said the heavy cases in the supercargo's cabin held gold. But from the day we left Java, homeward bound, everything went wrong, and the skipper's temper tallied with our luck. For whole weeks we lay becalmed, and when the wind did come it either came in squalls or blew from the wrong quarter. We held on as best we could till Madagascar was sighted, and then we ran into a couple of pirates, who shot our masts down and bored holes in us from bow to stern. We careened at Table Bay, and put to sea once more with a ship and a skipper the worse for wear. Next day we lay becalmed off the coast, and three greasy Hottentot heathens put off in a dug-out to barter some skins with us. They were down below when the breeze freshened, and out of pure devilment the skipper plied them with drink, and carried them and their craft to sea with us. When they came to, they

found themselves in irons. They nearly went mad; and that night one of them managed to get free, and was found trying to lower their cockle-shell. The captain was on deck at the time or no one would have stopped him. As it was, the whole three of them, bound hand and foot, were put in the boat and dropped astern. Then Vanderdecken went aft and fired at them with his carbine and pistols. Each time he shot he hit a helpless victim; and he fired five times before that boat with its cargo of horrors drifted away into the darkness."

Parson Waddilove gave a gasp of horror.

"And you called yourselves men and allowed this infamy to happen!"

"A skipper does as he likes on his own ship, sir," said Oram doggedly. "Brands did tell him what the rest of us only dared think, and the next day he was keel-hauled for mutiny. We all gave the captain a wide berth, but few of us escaped his heavy hand, and never a week passed without one or another of us feeling the irons or the cat. Off the Azores we sprung a leak. The cargo—even the coffers of gold—had to go overboard, and then the pumps only just managed to keep the ship afloat. It was with a mutinous crew, a rotten ship, and the temper of the devil that Vanderdecken entered the port of Amsterdam, and when we were safely moored off the Waser Keye there was not one of us but swore he would see the skipper at Davy Jones before he would sail with him again."

"I should think so indeed," cried the Parson. "Wild beasts were the fit companions of such a monster."

"And yet, sir, when he was ready for his next voyage six of us went back on our oath. He had always had an evil reputation, and the report of his last devilries had increased it, and he couldn't make up a crew without us. He offered us, his old hands, double wage and money down before we sailed, and for the sake of the gold we took our kits into his fo'c's'le—Heckhausen, Bergh, Jansen, Krantz, Hans Biebrich and myself. We soon found out our mistake. As the skipper had paid us double wages he thought he had the right to treat us doubly ill, and nothing we did found favour with him. He came across Heckhausen staggering forrad to his bunk after a dirty night's watch in the Channel, and told him he was drunk. Heckhausen gave him the lie, and had his head broken in with Vanderdecken's speaking-trumpet. He made me, master gunner though I was, clean every blessed weapon on board as they never had been cleaned before. The nine-pounders, the cohorns and patteraroes, every popgun on board was overhauled as if we were going to tackle

the whole Spanish fleet, and the skipper stood over me blasting me for a lazy land-lubber the while. Jansen had too much schnapps one day—there was no doubt about that—but he got three dozen with the cat for it. Sooner than finish the voyage with that hell-hound—begging your worship's pardon—the six of us deserted when the ship ran into Lisbon river, and Vanderdecken sailed without us.

“Your worship knows the story of that last voyage of his—how the ship was beaten back again and again; how the captain heaved the pilot overboard in a fit of blind passion; how in his blasphemy he swore by the sacred cross that he would double the Cape, though he had to sail till the last day to do it; how God doomed him to fulfil his vow; and how, as a spectre ship, the vessel is still seen carrying out the decree of the Almighty, while the vessel that sees her battling against the adverse winds and weather with which she is eternally surrounded is herself doomed to destruction.”

The clergyman nodded.

“Yes, I have heard the story of the *Flying Dutchman*.”

“Then perhaps your worship can tell me why God should punish an innocent crew for the skipper's faults? He damned them both equally, and to a plain sailor like myself it doesn't seem right.”

“It is simply a sailor's yarn, Reuben. The whole story is a mere legend—a myth.”

“There, by your leave, sir, you are wrong. But we'll come back to that. Well, we did not hang together long when we deserted, and after some years of wandering up and down, I came over here, herring-fishing with Hans Biebrich, when I chanced to meet my Sally, as bonny a lass as I had ever clapped eyes on. We agreed to hitch up together, and as you know, Parson, I married and settled here, and have lived an honest life, at peace with my neighbours, and I hope with God.”

“Yes, Reuben,” said the clergyman, “I know nothing to your detriment, and I have even pointed you out as a model for others to imitate.”

“God forbid, sir, any man should wish to live my life. Well, Parson, so I lived, happy and contented, until a month or so ago, when I took the opportunity of running over to Amsterdam, with a fleet of returning schuyts, to see how it fared with old shipmates there. I found Hans, but he was in great distress. He was expecting a letter.”

“Who from?”

“From the skipper—Vanderdecken.”

"But according to you, Vanderdecken exists no longer in the flesh."

"That is so, sir, and that is why the letter troubled Hans. It was a summons he expected, and it would have to be obeyed."

"But why? Spirits cannot compel attendance, can they?" said the Parson lightly.

Oram shook his head.

"There were four deserters besides Hans and myself, and he told me that Heckhausen, Bergh, Jansen, and Krantz had each received the summons in their turn, and had died mysteriously soon afterwards. Biebrich was expecting his summons when I left him."

"Tut, tut, man," said the other. "He and his mates were no doubt overwrought by the thought of Vanderdecken and his supposed fate. If the others have met with sudden and even mysterious deaths it is a coincidence only, and in no way to be connected with your captain."

"There was the summons, sir—a written summons to each man."

Parson Waddilove laughed.

"Reuben Oram, I gave you credit for more sense. It's astonishing what you sailors will believe. Just look the facts calmly in the face and see what grounds you have for crediting this devilish story. After you deserted, Vanderdecken proceeded on his course, and the ship was probably lost off the Cape. The captain would have to answer the Almighty in another world for his wicked deeds. What evidence have you that his vessel was ever seen as a spectre ship? You as a sailor know of what are called mirages—optical delusions whereby objects at a far distance are sometimes apparent near at hand. What is there to prevent the appearance in the southern seas of a mirage of some vessel—not unlike Vanderdecken's—surrounded by stormy seas, and maybe buffeted by adverse winds? Having heard of the legend of the spectre ship, the crew at once conclude they have indeed seen that vessel, and should ill-fortune meet them afterwards, they readily ascribe their troubles to it. Come, Reuben, you must admit that this is reasonable. The Romanists are ready and even wishful to believe in these tales of marvel. Cannot we of the true Church teach them a lesson, and refuse to accept their childish legends?"

"But what of the written summons, sir?"

"What of it, indeed? Your mates were, like yourself, much influenced by their connection with Vanderdecken and on the look out for further supernatural events. Any ill-natured wag might play on their feelings, and if some one chose to perpetrate

this sorry joke, they would readily believe it to be a letter from the ill-fated captain himself. Much brooding over it might well hasten their end, as it may do yours. Why even now you told me that Biebrich was expecting the summons when you left. That proves my words. He doesn't even wait for its coming. He anticipates it. Small wonder if some wag should take advantage of his weakness—no doubt well known."

Oram listened attentively to the clergyman as he spoke.

"I wish I could believe it so, sir," he said, "for what you say sounds indeed reasonable enough; but I cannot, I cannot. Parson, I am in earnest. Am I a man likely to be frightened by some old woman's tale? There is in my heart that which tells me it is all true, and that my summons will come in its turn, maybe before Hans gets his. Only one thing can I do that may avert it. I spent every guilder of Vanderdecken's gold before I knew of the curse that might attach to it, and as I received it for services I did not render, I ought not to have touched it. But I can make restitution. See, sir, here is the amount in full—something over maybe. It was put by for the wife in case anything should happen to me, but if it saves her husband's soul she would not think it misspent. Take it, sir. Give it to the service of God, and I may yet be saved."

The Parson looked longingly at the glittering heap of silver and gold. The church bell, long cracked, was now broken and useless; the pulpit was shaky in its foundations; the church roof leaked; windows were broken beyond patching, and the poor were ever at his doors. Yet he dared not, without authority, take the money for these purposes.

"I will refer the matter to his Grace the Archbishop," said he with a sigh, for he much feared the needs of the diocese would prove greater than those of the parish; "but you may rely upon it, Reuben, that the money will indeed be devoted to the service of God, and if this is the only link that binds you to a spectre captain, you need fear no molestation from him."

Oram seemed greatly relieved, and the clergyman did his best to deepen the impression he had made.

"Now, Reuben," said he, "bury your past. Lose yourself in gratitude to God that you are well and strong, blessed with a good wife and bonny children. Work for them and think of them, and banish for ever all thoughts of spectre ships and spectre captains, and all will yet go well with you."

Oram took the clergyman's proffered hand respectfully, thanked him for his consolation, and returned home with a lighter heart than he had known for many a long day.

"A strange tale," Parson Waddilove muttered as he gathered the coins and deposited them in an old teapot on his top shelf. "A strange tale indeed. I like it not. Such things have been."

II.

SOME two months after the above, Reuben Oram returned home one evening after a hard day's toil. Fish had been plentiful of late; rarely he cast anchor but his coble was filled to the thwarts with codling, whiting, or other spoil, and he now knew that, despite his donation to the Vicar, he had laid by enough to see him through the winter months. An enterprising tradesman had recently set up a shop in the village, and Oram had had one or two long consultations with him. To-day he stepped inside again, and when he left the shop his pockets bulged out suspiciously.

The children met him at the gate of his few yards of garden, for they had been on the watch for him, and his wife greeted him on the doorstep. No sooner inside than, with great importance, Reuben produced a little packet.

"Lass, this is for you," he said to his wife. "It's no great thing, but I have thought for a long time past you sadly needed something like it."

Mistress Oram gave her man a hearty kiss before she opened it.

"It's downright good of you, Reuben, to have thought of me. Well, I do declare—a brooch that looks like real gold, and glass the image of diamonds! I shall look grand in it, Reuben, on Sundays. And won't Mary Proctor envy me! Here's another kiss, lad."

The children gathered round the trinket, and eyed it with awe. The glass flashed bravely in the light, and the metal shone with fine determination to ape its betters.

"And now, lassie, what's in this parcel, I wonder?" said Oram, producing a larger and bulkier package.

The little mite seized it eagerly, and with hands trembling with excitement untied the string and unwrapped the paper.

"A doll! a doll, mother! Isn't she a beauty—and look at her hair—and hasn't she rosy cheeks!" and the child took it in her arms and crooned over it with delight.

"I wonder if there's anything for Tom," said the father when he had taken his fill of his bairn's joy; "I wonder now," and he dived into various pockets with a fine pretence of search.

The lad was all agog with excitement, and when the parcel at length came to light and the paper was unwrapped and a glorious cockle boat, painted in brilliant hues, was disclosed to view, he gave vent to his unbounded satisfaction.

"And now, lad," said Mistress Oram, beaming with importance, "presents all round to-day. I've got something for you. Not that I bought it, but it came, and I've the giving of it. See here," and she produced something from under the table-cloth. "A letter," she said, "from Lunnon."

Letters were few and far between in those days, and this was the first which had ever reached this humble household.

"A letter—for me?" said Oram in a strange, harsh voice.

"Yes, it's been waiting at York this week past. Cockles the carrier brought it to-day, and there's a whole shilling to pay on it."

Qram did not hear her. The blood had gone from his face, and his hands trembled as he clutched it.

"Why, what ails you, lad?" cried the woman.

"It's nothing—nothing—I'm only tired," said Reuben, as he gazed mechanically at his wife's present; "I think I'll take a turn outside. Bide indoors, Sally, till I come back."

His wife gazed at him with anxious wonder as he left the house. She watched him to the corner of the road and then turned from the window. The brooch was on the table, but the mock diamond seemed to have lost its lustre and the would-be gold looked tarnished; but the children were happy with their toys.

Parson Waddilove was preparing his sermon when he was disturbed, and he left his manuscript with a sigh.

"What is it, Reuben?" he said.

"Parson," he cried with a world of agony in his voice. "Parson, it's come—the summons. Here it is."

The clergyman took the letter and read the superscription.

"To REUBEN ORAM,
mariner,
at the Bridlington Keye,
hard by York,
England."

"Well, what is this? An unopened letter. From some old shipmate, doubtless. The summons? Pshaw! Reuben, I'm ashamed of you and your old dames' fears."

"For God's sake read it, Parson. You'll see who's right then," and, with nails clenched into the palms of his hands and teeth

biting his lips till the blood came, he stood over the clergyman as he broke the wafers and unfolded the letter.

One glance sufficed, and the Vicar sat bolt upright in his chair with a startled look.

Oram turned round and faced the window. Even at that terrible moment he did not care that Parson Waddilove should see his face.

"Read it, sir," he said firmly, after a moment's silence.

The Parson read:—

"To REUBEN ORAM.

"The Captain is short handed and summons deserters; so make ready. Heckhausen, Bergh, Jansen, Kranz and Biebrich are on board. You will join the first day of December.

"VANDERDECKEN."

There was a long pause.

"Do you believe me now, sir?" said Oram with a bitter smile, turning round at length.

"Lad," said the clergyman gravely, "the letter—summons, as you call it—is here undoubtedly; but I am still of the mind it is some scurvy trick played upon you as upon the others."

"Summons or trick, they all died soon afterwards," said Oram doggedly.

"Then make up your mind to live, Reuben. If you determine you are going to die on the day named—December first—then die you may, but if you trust in God and defy the power of the evil one to reach you, then you will live."

"That cursed gold," muttered Oram.

"No longer cursed, Reuben. Only to-day I received a letter from our good Archbishop. He hath been pleased to allow your money to go to the purchasing of our new church bell. December first is yet a month ahead. I will journey this week to York and arrange for the bell to be delivered and fixed by then; and that shall be the date of its consecration. As it rings out its sacred notes you shall know that the money has lost its curse by being devoted to the service of the Almighty, and that by its agency, for generations yet to come, shall souls be saved from eternal punishment and not lost."

For the moment the Parson's words brought a ray of hope to Oram's heart; but at each step nearer home his spirits sank. The bell might ring—but the summons had come.

III.

THE days passed, and the summons was never out of Oram's mind. He brooded over it by day and dreamed of it at night. He lost flesh and became a mass of nerves. His wife was much alarmed at his altered condition, but Oram, though he gave her many reasons for it, withheld the true cause. She divined it had some connection with the letter, but the very mention of it distressed her husband so much that she dared not refer to it again. She did her best to cheer and comfort him, but she was hurt he should wish to hide anything from her. His neighbours and mates were quick to note the change in his manner and appearance, and many were the explanations offered. Of course it was known he had received a letter, and soon the rumour spread that it was from a former wife, who threatened an immediate descent on his present household. Oram vouchsafed no information: he rarely spoke to anyone now. He grew surly and neglected his work. And so the month wore on.

It was the last day of November. The whole day Oram had wandered about in a fever of unrest and anxiety. The morrow was the date fixed by the summons—what it would bring him the wretched man scarcely dared think of. Was he to die as the others had died? Had the consecration of the money defeated Vanderdecken's fell purpose? Or was it all a fable and a myth, as Parson Waddilove had urged? To-morrow at this time he would know. Dusk was falling, night was gathering in, as Reuben Oram, filled with these unhappy thoughts, was making his way homewards. His cottage was now in view: the light streaming from the window and the open door. That, at any rate, was his haven for to-night. Let to-morrow—Good God! what was that? His eyes had glanced seawards, and suddenly he stopped as though rooted to the ground. The blood ran cold in his veins; his eyes started from their sockets; his very heart seemed to stand still, while his limbs trembled as though he were palsy-stricken.

There were others looking seawards that evening, and they afterwards declared they saw nothing unusual; there was the little fishing fleet at anchor—that was all. But Oram saw something more than this.

With her sails set dead against the wind he saw the Spectre Ship enter the bay.

“My God,” he cried, “the captain's come for me!”

There was a pause. By the second hand of your watch you could

have counted twelve, and then, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and with steady feet, Reuben Oram walked to his home.

The children were in bed, but he roused them from their slumbers. With one perched on either knee and his wife in the ingle-nook, he sat before his untouched supper and talked and laughed as he had used to. He sang them songs, he told them wondrous tales; and the youngsters crowded with glee, while their mother smiled happily upon them. The cloud had passed; her goodman was himself again. Then the bairns fell asleep in his arms and he put them to bed himself, and kissed them—and then—and then he turned to his wife—and told her all.

There was no sleep for man or woman in the cottage that night, and when the sun was high in the heavens there they still sat, hand in hand, waiting for the end.

The gate creaked on its hinges, footsteps were heard outside, and a knock came at the door.

"Reuben, Reuben," said a well-known voice.

"It's only the Parson, lad," said the wife, and she rose and unbarred the door.

"Well, good folk," said the cheery clergyman. "This is a nice time to be abed. Why, how's this?" as his eye caught the ashes of yesterday's fire, yesterday's meal untouched, the bed unslept in.

Oram muttered something unintelligible, while his wife caught up the children from their cot, and took them into the wash-house to dress. Oram and the Parson were left alone together.

"Reuben, I've bad news for you. The bell was fixed yester-e'en and all seemed well. Overnight one of the beams on which it was hung gave way, for it seems the strain was too great. The bell crashed through the floor below and is broken."

Oram laughed. "A good omen, sir, for to-day. But what matters it? Do you think the ringing of a bell would keep the devil away? You should try candle and censer and say mass. The Romanists have more powerful weapons, Parson."

"Reuben, Reuben," said the clergyman, greatly shocked, "these words become you not."

Again the man laughed—a hideous laugh. "They will become me worse to-morrow, Parson, when I am damned. Vanderdecken is here. The foul ship came last night with her cargo of spectres. There would have been a choir full of them for the consecration, and the skipper could have sounded his speaking trumpet right merrily; no doubt they had a fine time of it in the belfry last night."

Parson Waddilove stared at the sailor in silent horror. He was evidently going mad.

"Parson," he went on with terrible earnestness, "you'll see to Sally and the bairns after—after to-day. Here's money," and he opened a chest and produced a bag therefrom. "Here's money that will see them through the winter—then God help them, for I cannot. You'll look after them, sir? The lass might go as a serving wench when she is old enough, and the lad must be a sailor, I trow. But, Parson, tell him never to sail in a ship bound for the Cape. Merciful heaven! to think of him meeting his father's ship and being doomed to perish. Make him swear it, sir, by all that's holy. And the wife—my Sally—oh, God! how can I talk of these things—it's worse than death itself—" and the man broke down and hid his face in his arms.

Suddenly he started up, pale and ashy as death.

"Hark!" said he, with "That's the captain's voice," and he stared at the door with deadly terror written on his face.

He rose to his feet, swaying to and fro like a drunken man and holding on to the table for support.

"I am ready, skipper," he said.

The clergyman followed the direction of his eyes, but he saw nothing unwonted in the room. There was no one there but themselves.

Oram made one or two steps forward as though following an invisible guide—then he tottered and fell to the floor, insensible.

"Mistress Oram! Mistress Oram!" cried the clergyman as he bent over the sailor; and the affrighted woman rushed in. Together they lifted him on the bed; and, leaving the wife chafing his hands and bathing his head, the Vicar ran off to procure what medical assistance the village afforded.

It was some hours before Parson Waddilove finally left the cottage. He waited till the leech arrived and the patient had been bled, and consciousness had returned; he called again in the afternoon, and once more late at night to see how he was progressing. He left him fast asleep under the influence of a potent drug the apothecary had been obliged to administer.

The clergyman left the house about eleven o'clock. He was much distressed by the events of the day, and now he determined to take a walk on the cliffs to compose himself.

The night was fine, and there was a glorious moon shining on the water. All looked peaceful and calm; and a sudden desire seized the Parson to have a short pull. Despite his increasing years and weight, he often took a boat out when the tide was

favourable and the water calm ; and it was so now. It was almost the bottom of the ebb ; in half an hour the tide would turn and bring him back. He made his way down the cliffs to the little landing stage, alongside which the boats were moored, and chose one—Oram's—he knew of old. He hunted for a pair of blades, and, having found them, cast off from the mooring ring and pulled out into the bay.

In five minutes or so he rested. His mind was too busy for physical exertion. His thoughts persisted in turning to Oram.

"His mind must have become unhinged by much brooding over the letter," said the Parson to himself ; "and last night he said he saw the Spectre Ship. As if such a thing were possible——" Then he stopped. His heart beat as though he had heard the first Trump of Judgment ; his scalp tightened ; the blood curdled in his veins.

There, not fifty yards away, lay the weird semblance of a vessel, a three-masted merchantman. There was hurrying to and fro on board, for she was preparing to sail, but not a sound was audible. Shapes of men were straddling on the foot-ropes of the topsail yards, loosing the canvas out of the gaskets. There was a capstan on the high forecastle head, the bars manned and the cable already hove short. There was a filmy fiddler on the capstan top, fiddling a soundless tune. By the high poop lanterns stood the phantom captain, with his speaking trumpet under his arm, shouting orders unheard. There she lay, in outward form a vessel ; but there was no colour, no substance. She was white ; impalpable as a shadow, vague as a dream—in truth a Spectre Ship.

Parson Waddilove gazed at the white glare in spell-bound horror. Ha ! what is that ? A boat swings up and out from the booms, and is lowered. Four sailors climb down, and with noiseless strokes put off and pull towards him, shorewards. Nearer, nearer they come, and he is fascinated by their approach. He tries to shout a warning, but the words stick in his throat. They are but a boat length away. Now they are on him, right amid-ship. He waits for the crash.

A shadow flits by. They are gone.

His eyes follow. Unheedingly they are pulling to the shore. A cloud passes over the moon and they are lost. The Parson strains his senses, listening and watching in breathless suspense. Not a sound is to be heard, save the faint clash of the sea breaking on the weed-wrack and shingle. Ha ! there they are again. Great God ! what is that ?

There are now five men in the boat !

On they come, the fifth man holding the tiller. They pass the

Parson's boat scarce a dozen yards off. That fifth shadow—that ghostly semblance of a man—*it is Reuben Oram.*

They pull to the vessel, climb on board, the boat is hauled up, and the anchor broken out of the ground. One by one the sails unfold and, straining at their sheets and bolt ropes, belly out in the breezeless night. The ship swings round and, against the incoming tide, surges away to sea.

The crew of the *Flying Dutchman* was complete.

HENRY A. HERING.

The Strange Preacher.

PART I.

HE was first seen in Irthdale one chill March evening, none knowing whence he came, a tall gaunt figure with burning eyes. His voice, hands, gestures, his whole bearing, even the shabby clothes that hung loosely about his wasted frame, were those of a gentleman; and this fact was at once perceived and commented upon by the keen-witted untidy Lancashire crowd that gathered round him, attracted by his novel personality.

He spoke with extraordinary ardour and vehemence, and his subject was the soul of man. Behind him a furnace threw out banners of flame, the roar distinctly audible in the pauses of his impassioned speech, and the glare shining redly on the wet pavement, for the day had been rainy. To right and left stretched the grimy street with its noisy traffic, its sooty buildings, its aggressive unloveliness. And above, where the clear opal-tinted sky arched like the hollow of the Almighty Hand, man had drawn a dun veil of shifting smoke that coiled and floated in the atmosphere like an exhalation from the pit.

Yet even the smoke could not wholly obscure the crystal purity of the March heaven. Beyond the stifling vapour shone a glimmer of blue, a blurred gold glow in the west, where the cathedral towers rose dimly out of the murky haze like towers in a dream. And truly as a vision of the City Beautiful was that sign of prayer and peace seen from the dirt and grime of the city made by hands, evil-smelling, prosperous Irthdale.

Several more listeners joined the little crowd round the preacher. A vendor of daffodils leant against a lamp-post, setting her basket down on the wet pavement, the yellow flowers looking like a reflection of the gold light in the west. Then a boy stopped. Then a big workman and his sweetheart, a blue-eyed fragile girl.

“ See th’ daffies, my lass? ” he said. “ Wilt tha ha’ a bunch? ”

"I loike th' sweet Nancies best," she replied, peering down into the basket, where white narcissi, as delicate as herself, nestled among the yellow.

"Fourpence a bunch fur Nancies," said the flower-seller.

The workman pulled out a handful of coppers, and the narcissi changed owners.

"They're main pretty, Will," the girl lifted the white blossoms to her face, "an' so sweet. Let's stay a minute an' list to th' preacher."

"A' reet, lass. I reckon I'm in noan hurry when tha'rt wi' me."

"Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay," cried the resonant voice of the preacher, "for shall the work say of Him that made it, He made me not? Repent! Oh, stubborn and rebellious generation, lest ye be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel, cast out unfit for the Master's use. Behold, the night cometh!" he pointed to the western glow. "Repent! lest your dawn be as that which rose upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar."

"That's mostly Scripture," whispered the girl, "I've heard it i' church."

"Hast tha? Well, th' chap's a rare hond at rolling it out. Th' bishop's nowt to him."

And the workman searched his pocket for coppers, as did several other men; for the preacher had paused, and naturally the crowd felt the moment had come for the hat to be passed round.

But the stranger's hat remained on his head, and saying simply, "I am grateful to you all for listening to me," he moved away. Then as hands were stretched out with pence in the palms, he shook his head and added, "Thank you. I never take money."

"Ay, but what'll tha do fur victuals?" inquired a listener with frank interest. "Take it, mester. Tha's earnt it fair enow, fur tha's called us pretty nigh everything tha could lay thy tongue to."

Again the preacher shook his head.

"Sithee," interposed the man with the girl beside him, "if tha willna take brass I'll pay fur thee at yon," indicating a neighbouring coffee-stall. But this offer was also declined, and the strange preacher went his way along the street in the direction of the high moorland without the town.

The crowd dispersed with various comments.

"He wudnot take owt fur's preaching? He mun be a bit soft i' th' head!"

"Happen he's a Methody."

"Nay, he isna. He's a gentleman. Ony fool con see that."

"Well, Methody or gentleman, he conna be more nor half-theer!"

"Wheer be his folks?"

"Happen they're glad to be shut on him. It's a' reet fur a stranger to start a preaching, but a mon conna stand it fro' his own flesh an' blood."

"Thot's true enow. I couldna stand it mysen."

Meanwhile the preacher held on his way with long swift strides that soon took him beyond the smoke and din of Irthdale. Up on the moorland the breath of spring was passing over the land. Celandine stars bloomed here and there by the willows, the moss looked greener, the grass-blades stood upright, no longer bowed by snow or crumpled by frost; and the growing grassy scent of spring rose up from the darkening earth. The sky was still full of light, pure pale green in the west, changing to clear cold blue overhead. Eastward a few stars glittered. On he walked in the gathering gloom, the lovely blue-green gloom that floated from under willow and hazel, filling the air with veils of shadow. Still he went onward, while the glimmering west faded and the stars grew brighter, as though they drew the vanishing light to their own radiance. A faint chill breath of air rustled in the dead fern, then died away. At last a darker blur than the leafless trees showed against the sky. It was a forsaken hut, once used by gamekeepers, and still fairly dry and comfortable, but now deserted because a man had hanged himself in it. The country-folk said that the dead man walked round and round the hut, trying vainly to re-enter it. And the town-folk believed the tale. Therefore the little wooden shelter stood silent and empty on the highest point of the moor, the latch of its rough door stiff with rust, and soft cushions of orange-tipped moss growing in the hinges. Perhaps the stranger had not heard the story of the suicide. Perhaps he did not care. He made straight for the lonely hut, opened the long-disused door, and passed into the darkness within.

From this time forward he became a familiar figure in the surrounding towns and villages, always preaching with the same vehemence and on the same subject, and always refusing to accept either money or hospitality. None knew his name. Men called him "the strange preacher," and regarded him with a sort of uneasy compassion. He was poor. He was in earnest. Month by month he grew thinner, his eyes wilder and brighter, his clothes shabbier. He lived the life of a saint, of an anchorite;

yet none craved his blessing or asked his prayers. Perhaps the sinister impression that he made on the minds of men was deepened by his own words. Once when he passed a group with the salutation, "The Lord be with you!" an old woman had responded, "an' wi' thee, preacher," The preacher's reply was ominous. "Woman," he said, "the Lord has long ceased to be with me." Then he strode on, unheeding the curious expression of doubt that passed over the faces of his hearers.

He lived in the hut on the moor. It would be more correct to say he slept in it, for no matter what the weather might be, each dawn the preacher set forth to deliver his message. Often he walked almost incredible distances to and from the towns he visited; yet however much he may have needed rest, part of the night, at least, seemed to be spent in vigil, for belated wayfarers saw light streaming through the chinks of the windowless hut till past midnight. A rumour went about the countryside that the yellow light gleaming from between the rough boards was no harmless candle or ordinary lamp, but an illumination of terrific and unholy character. One timorous spirit hazarded the conjecture that the strange preacher was the Evil One himself.

"He conna be that, fur he preaches against un," said a bystander.

"Eh, yo' con never be up to th' Owd Un's tricks," was the gloomy response.

But the question as to the nature of the light was settled by a farmer one market-day in Irthdale.

"'Tis nobbut an owd lantern wi' a tallow dip in it," he said, "fur I wur passing by th' hut this morning an' th' door wur woide open, so I see th' lantern hanging up. Theer wur nowt i' th' place barring a rickety table, a couple o' stools, a pile o' straw in a corner, an' a pitcher."

"Whash in pitcher?" asked a dishevelled gentleman who was propping himself against a pillar-box.

"Water, tha fool!"

An expression of muzzy disgust overspread the inquirer's countenance.

"Beashly!" he ejaculated. "All typhoid. Doctors shay so."

Here he fell in a heap, and a friend kicked him into a dark archway out of sight of the police.

That same evening, as Farmer Buckley was driving home across the moor, he overtook the strange preacher. The month was July, the day had been intensely hot, and the stranger's usually vigorous steps were flagging; the face turned at the sound of the wheels was white and worn, though the eyes

glittered as ever. Farmer Buckley pulled up, and offered the preacher a lift, which was accepted. As they drove on, Buckley, elated by having captured so rare and shy a bird, ventured on a further invitation.

"An' tha'll coom on to tea at th' farm, preacher? My wife'll be proud to see thee."

"Thank you, I will. I had some thoughts of applying to you for a little work. Some odd job about the farm, by which I could earn—not money, but—bread and candles."

"Bread an' cannels?" repeated Buckley, staring. "To be sure, preacher, to be sure! Theer's odd jobs i' plenty if tha hast a mind to 'em. They'll be rough jobs fur a gentleman."

"I should like them."

"As tha pleases, preacher. Tha con begin to-morrow morn if tha likes."

"Thank you."

No more was said till they reached the farm, where Mrs. Buckley hastily brought out the best teapot in honour of the stranger. But great was the dismay of the farmer and his wife when their guest asked for bread and water.

"Why, preacher," said Buckley, in a tone of strong remonstrance, "this bacon isna foreign make. I bred th' pig mysen, an' killed an' salted un too. An' th' missis'll bring thee a mug o' beer if tha dunnot take to tea."

"Oh, I like both tea and bacon," replied the guest, "but I have made a vow."

"Eh, well," responded the farmer with a sigh, "every mon buckles his belt to suit hissen. I'll tempt noan to break a vow. But it do seem a pity."

Later, when the preacher departed homewards, Mrs. Buckley expressed her opinion that "menfolk wur mostly fools, fur when did ye ever hear o' a woman taking a vow against good victuals?"

"Happen a woman drove him to it," suggested her husband.

"That wur Adam's tale, an' I'm fair sick on't," retorted the matron. "I wonder thee men arena sham't o' repeating it."

"Well, dunnot be hard on th' poor chap. He's coming here to-morrow, to work at a job or two fur bread an' cannels. He willna take brass."

Here Buckley related the conversation in the cart.

"An' tha never towd me a word about it till now, tha great gowk!" exclaimed his wife. "If I'd ha' known I'd ha' made up a parcel fur him to-neet. Most like he's gotten neither cannel to study his prayers wi', nor bread fur's breakfast."

"Eh, I never thowt o' that!" and Buckley half rose from his

chair, but sat down again, saying, "I conna go up theer mysen, an' he wouldna be pleased if I sent one o' the men. He'll do till morn, an' tha con give him summat afore he starts work."

Thus it happened that two days in each week the strange preacher worked on Buckley's farm, and as the farmer remarked, "he wur rare an' handy about th' place."

Naturally the preacher's vow was known all over the county in about forty-eight hours, and it tended to increase his sinister reputation.

"What do a chap take a vow loike that fur? Eh, he's done summat!" the last few words being uttered in ominous tones and with a doubting shake of the speaker's head. "'Tis no wonder he mun ha' a cannel fur to say his prayers. It's loike enow a mon ud be feart o' th' dark when he's done summat."

PART II.

HARVEST passed; golden September faded; and October came with its tawny colouring, its early twilights, its sweeping gales. One stormy afternoon Farmer Buckley, riding his favourite mare, started homeward from Irthdale market. A strong sou-wester had been blowing all day, steadily increasing in force towards sunset, till it was now bursting over the moor like a hurricane. The mare's pricked ears went round and round like miniature windmills as the blasts laid the willows nearly flat and careered hooting over the wide expanse. In the west the hurrying clouds suddenly parted, and a blaze of wild pale yellow light flooded earth and heaven. All the air quivered with the scintillating dazzle. It flashed back blindingly from the pools, seeming to meet myriad other flashes. The trees, the bushes, the herbage, the sandy track—all were blurred and vague in the glittering topaz haze of that stormy flare from the west—a beacon light kindled by some watching angel.

For perhaps three minutes the blaze lasted. Then a dimness fell over the land. The rift in the clouds gleamed for a moment a narrow space of living gold, then closed; and the night and the wind darkened and raged over the moor.

The moon was nearly at the full, therefore a pale suffused glimmer filtered through the hurrying clouds, giving light enough to see the wildly-tossing branches and still wilder shadows. Farmer Buckley settled his hat more firmly on his head and himself more firmly in his seat.

"Whoa, lass! Theer!" he said as the mare shied violently at a beckoning shadow, "I dunnot wonder at tha being feart. Th' devil mun be abroad to-neet for sure. Steady theer!"

But as they reached higher ground the force of the wind was such that the animal could with difficulty be persuaded to face it. Each frenzied gust seemed to give one desperate tug to every bush and tree, and then went shrieking over the moor in savage disappointment. The roar of the tempest was incessant, yet through it all Buckley's accustomed ears could distinguish the swish of the willows and confused rustling of fern, the dry crackling of oak boughs against each other, the plume-like hiss of the larches as the wind drove through them.

"I reckon we mun be nigh th' preacher's hut," he said aloud. "I've half a mind to shelter wi' him till th' gale slackens a bit. Theer!—lass—theer!" as a hooting blast tore overhead, and the mare reared and plunged.

At that moment the farmer caught sight of a dim black mass from which emanated a faint shining. It was the hut, and evidently the strange preacher was at prayer. Buckley rode up to the side whence the strongest light issued. He knew the door was there, and he knocked vigorously with his whip-handle.

"Preacher!" he shouted, "wilt tha take us in fur awhile?—me an' th' mare?"

But no one stirred inside.

"He connan surely be out i' a' this," soliloquized the farmer. "Anyway, if he be, I'll make free to go in—mare an' a'. No Christian mon 'ud grudge a roof to-neet."

The mare was standing quietly. Perhaps she recognised the hut as a human dwelling and expected shelter. Buckley dismounted, and holding the bridle, tried the latch. It yielded easily to his finger, and he gently pushed it open, saying apologetically:

"I ask thy pardon, preacher, fur disturbing thee at thy hour o' prayer, but th' wind's know to—"

Sheer astonishment checked his utterance. Was he dreaming? Did he in truth see the strange preacher sitting at the rickety table beneath the swinging lantern?—his eyes glittering, his pinched face white in the dim light, his thin fingers clutching the cards wherewith he was apparently playing a game against an invisible adversary whose hand lay on the table. He glanced round as Buckley opened the door, said briefly, "Yes. Come in," and continued the game.

"Tha'll noan mind th' mare coming in too? Tha knows

Balaam's ass had a sight more sense nor his master, an' I've thowt at times as it mout be th' same wi' th' mare an' me."

"Bring her in," said the preacher, leaning over to play his adversary's card.

Buckley led in the mare, carefully shut the door, and hung the bridle over a nail in the wall, remarking—

"Hoo'll stand as quiet as a lamb."

Then he looked again at the card-strewn table. Apparently the invisible antagonist held better cards than the preacher, or else the latter played more skilfully for his opponent than for himself; for as the farmer watched, the game ended to the preacher's loss. He flung up his arms with a wild despairing gesture, hastily gathered the pack together, shuffled and cut, and dealt again.

Buckley felt puzzled. This was not enjoyment. What was it? What could be its purpose? His natural courtesy checked the questions rising to his lips, therefore he merely observed tentatively—

"I'm glad I didna disturb thy hour o' prayer, preacher."

The preacher paused in his deal and laughed mirthlessly.

"My hour of prayer did you call it? You speak truth. This is truly my hour of prayer—the hour when each night I play with the devil for my soul."

Farmer Buckley's hair softly stirred upon his head.

"Fur thy soul?" he repeated.

"For my soul. I lost it to him. At cards. Now I try to get it back."

"An' do he keep winning?"

"Always."

Again Buckley felt that faint crinkling of his scalp.

The preacher finished his deal and picked up his own cards, the farmer still standing looking on. There were no chairs in the hut, only two rough stools, on one of which sat his strange host. The other was placed as though for the invisible player.

"Is yon stool set fur th' devil?" inquired Buckley.

"Yes," replied his host without raising his head.

"Well, it dunnot seem fitting to my mind that a Christian should stand on's feet while th' devil sits. So wi' your leave, preacher, I'll take th' stool mysen."

He drew the stool away from the table and seated himself squarely upon it with a determined air.

The game went on. No one spoke again. Within the hut all was silence save for the slap-slap of the cards, the slight sound of the mare's feet and the jingling of her bit as she amused herself by

picking at the heap of straw near her. Without, the storm roared and shrieked round and over the hut as though the little shelter were submerged in a furious sea. Wave after wave of the wild gale beat on its rough timbers and whistled through its crevices. Still the playing went on, and still Farmer Buckley watched the game.

"By th' Mass!" he muttered, using in his perplexity the old oath that still so strangely survives in the north, "theer isna a mon i' a' th' countryside as would believe this if I towd him on th' Book."

The devil's luck still held. The preacher lost, despaired, shuffled, cut, dealt again, all under the steady observation of Buckley's grave brown eyes. Perhaps having snatched the devil's stool spurred him to further and bolder defiance. Or perhaps a feeling of compassion and a kindly wish to help, mingling with the instinctive desire to take a hand in a fight that is characteristic of every decently-bred Briton. Whatever the cause, a brilliant idea flashed into Buckley's mind as the preacher was preparing for another deal.

"Howd on a minute, preacher," he said, "I've been turning o'er this matter i' my mind, an' I reckon I've gotten howd o' th' reet end o' th' stick. Sithee, a good Christian ought to be a match fur th' devil any day, but it stonds to reason that tha conna tackle him well wi' thy soul in 's claws so to speak. Now here I be, baptised regular i' church, an' confirmed, an' wed an' a'; an' taking one thing wi' another I'm as clean a liver as any mon I know. So if tha'll take th' devil's seat an' cards," rising from the stool, "I'll take thine an' play thee an' th' devil fur thy soul."

His host stared up at him with wild glittering eyes, and a thunderous blast swept over the hut like a heavy sea.

"'The Prince of the Power of the Air!'" cried the preacher with a distraught laugh and an upward flourish of his hand.

"Ay, I know that," replied the farmer sturdily, "an' I dunnot care. Let un bellow hissen hoarse. Coom, preacher, hond o'er them cards an' give me thy seat, an' I warrant I'll win thy soul back fur thee afore dayleet."

A moment's hesitation, then the preacher rose.

"I will try it," he said. "It will be in vain, but I will try it."

"There's nowt like trying," observed Buckley, as he took his host's seat and began dealing, while the preacher drew up the other stool opposite.

Thus the strange game entered on a new phase. Yet still the devil's luck held, for Buckley lost and lost, while the storm raved without, and the mare fidgeted and picked the straw, and jingled

her bit, pricking her ears uneasily as a wilder gust than usual shook the hut. Now and then when the wind lulled for a moment, strange sounds seemed to gather outside ; eerie whisperings, low hootings, broken laughter that ended in choking gasps and stifled screams. Then the wind would suddenly rise again with a sweeping rush as of great billows bursting overhead. The air was filled with a Witches' Sabbath of sound.

And through it all the two sat playing. The preacher, a man wrecked in mind and body, his limbs wasted, his eyes lit by no sane fires—the destroyed personating the Destroyer ; Buckley, a man essentially antagonistic to the disintegrating force of the Lord's opponent, a man of solid worth, of calmness of nerve and dogged courage, of capacity to meet unmoved unexpected crises of life, of healthy impulses of strong compassion and steady resistance to evil—priceless jewels bequeathed by God-fearing and wholesome-living ancestors, jewels which we are daily—hourly dropping into the hands of the harlot science and her paramour the devil. “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” And still the old temptation draws, though the Tree of Knowledge was not that of Life.

The dark hours drifted by, the candle in the lantern guttered, sank, was replaced by another and another, the uproar of the storm increased, wave after wave of thunderous sound engulfed them, then passed howling over the moorland. Buckley continued to lose.

“You see the uselessness of striving,” said the preacher, looking at the farmer with eyes like the Ancient Mariner's. “The devil will keep his own.”

“I'm noan so sure o' that,” responded Buckley. “It's loike enow th' Owd Lad ud howd on well till midneet, an' happen fro' that till one, but after one o'-th'-clock he's bound to weaken. Besides, it'll be St. Simon an' Jude to-morrow.”

Here a tremendous gust burst open the door with a hoot, blowing the cards off the table into the air, where they gyrated for a moment in company with bits of straw, then fluttered down in all directions. The mare laid her ears back and snorted, glaring at the grey-black night beyond the open door—a faintly luminous blackness wherein tossing branches flung and writhed against the sky.

“Nay now,” said Buckley, naturally irate at what he regarded as a mean trick on the part of the great enemy, “I'll noan stond that ! I'll make thee play fair !”

He rose from his seat, drew from a capacious pocket a strong piece of twine, and closing the door, proceeded to tie the latch in

such a manner that nothing short of a cyclone could blow it open again. This done, he surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction, then turned to the mare.

"Theer, lass!—theer—theer!" patting her. "Theer's naught fur thee to be feart on. I reckon hoo sees more than we do," this to the preacher, who had not stirred from his seat, "an' th' devil conna be a pretty sight fur mon nor beast. Con thee call to mind how th' game wur?" picking up the scattered cards.

"I think so."

"A' reet. So con I."

He replaced the cards, arranged his own hand, which he had stuck into a crack in the table when he rose to shut the door, and the playing was resumed.

Presently the farmer drew out his watch, looked at it, and remarked in a tone of anticipated triumph—

"Past midneet, an' th' day Simon an' Jude."

After which he slapped his cards down defiantly.

Whether owing to Buckley's air of assured victory, or to the remembrance of the day being that of Saints Simon and Jude, who might reasonably be expected to back the farmer, or whether the poor half-starved body was unequal to the strain, who can tell? Certain it is that as the hours crept on the preacher's play became less decisive, more faltering. Perhaps the poor whirling brain missed the added excitement of the storm, for the violence of the gale was subsiding. By two o'clock it was still blowing hard, but the wind no longer roared and beat upon the moorland as in the earlier hours of the night.

Three o'clock came—four—five.

"By th' Mass!" shouted Buckley, flinging down his cards triumphantly, "I've won! Ay, I have!—I've won! I've done th' devil out o' thy soul, preacher! I towd thee I'd win! A Christian wur bound to win! Theer thou art, reet enow, fair an' square, soul an' a'! Eh? what's wrong? Howd up, mon!"

For the cards slipped from the preacher's fingers with a little clatter, the glitter died out of his eyes, he swayed sideways, and would have fallen on the floor had not Buckley caught him.

"Theer! theer!" said the farmer soothingly, in much the same tones as he used to the mare, "tha'll feel a' reet presently. This sort o' thing's enow to upset any mon. Happen tha'd like to lie down a bit?"

He got the preacher on to the heap of straw that served as a bed, and then held the pitcher to his lips.

"I wish I'd browt my whiskey-flask wi' me. Theer isna much to be said fur water i' sickness. Dost tha think tha could sit th'

mare if I led her? Th' missis 'ud be pleased to nurse thee awhile. How art tha feeling now, preacher?"

The preacher opened his eyes, and Buckley was startled, for their expression had changed. Also, the whole face had changed. However mad the stranger might have been, he was undoubtedly sane now—sane, and dying.

"Wilt tha let me fetch th' doctor? Tha's seen him at th' farm. He isna a bad sooart, tha knows."

The preacher smiled. Buckley had seen him laugh wildly, crazily, but never before had he seen him smile.

"As you please. It does not matter. Thank you."

"I'll be back in a jiffy," said Buckley. "Tha con make sure o' that." The wind had sunk. Only the fresh chill air of the dark morning floated in as the door was unfastened and the mare led out. Then Buckley mounted and rode off.

Grey light was spreading over the moorland as he drew rein in the nearest village, whence he could see his own roof rising out of the trees not a mile away. The village street was empty and silent, but from several chimneys faint blue curls of smoke ascended. The farmer looked at the little church and the vicarage beside it.

"Happen I'd best tell th' owd parson first, afore I ride on to th' doctor's," he said to himself, "it isna o'er early to rouse him up. Theer's th' kitchen fire alight."

The vicar was an old man, and strange to say, his years had taught him wisdom. He listened in silence to the astonishing tale related by Buckley, and then said:—

"I will walk up to the hut at once and take some restoratives with me."

"'Tis three mile good," said Buckley. "I thowt happen yo'd loike to drive up theer i' th' doctor's carriage."

"Perhaps you and he may overtake me," replied the vicar.

Buckley departed, and in less than ten minutes the vicar started on his way. He had been a stalwart man in his youth, and even now at seventy-five his step was still firm and fairly swift. The dawn brightened round him as he walked on, a dawn so calm and fair, that but for the evidence of the fallen leaves that lay in swept-up heaps whither the fierce wind had driven them, and the torn and broken boughs that everywhere strewed the ground, the storm of the previous night might have been a dream. The sun rose in misty, autumnal brilliancy, and the vicar's shadow, long and blurred, moved before him on the uneven track.

"Curious!" he murmured, "very curious! I am not sure that

I ought to countenance it. Yet if Buckley's action has soothed a troubled and bewildered mind——? Sometimes these simple souls do more wisely than we, who in our idle vanity think we know so much."

He knocked at the door of the hut, but none replied. Then he gently lifted the latch, saying as he entered, "Peace be to this house."

And truly peace was there. The vicar paused on the threshold, the sunshine streaming past him into the hut, lighting up the heap of straw and the stark figure that lay thereon. With quiet footsteps he approached the miserable bed, leant over the figure and touched the forehead. Then he straightened himself, and pulling a stool towards him—for he was old, and wearied with his walk—he seated himself, drew a prayer-book from his pocket, and began to read the prayer for the departing soul.

A little morning breeze stole in at the open door and stirred the straw; a robin sang without; and the vicar's fine, sonorous voice, rose and fell on the stillness, repeating the words that, during so many centuries, have risen to God with so many English souls, from every clime beneath the blue. A sound of wheels mingled with the closing sentence. Buckley, followed by the doctor, stood in the doorway. "Amen," said the vicar, and shutting the book, he pointed to that which had been the strange preacher.

* * * * *

In the village churchyard, a plain cross with the initials, H. W., erected by the vicar, marks the resting-place of the strange preacher. These initials were on his linen, which, though worn and ragged, was of fine quality. None ever knew his name or his history.

Thirty years have passed since then. The vicar too sleeps in the old churchyard, and the snows of seventy winters have whitened Buckley's head. But through all the changes and chances of these thirty years, he has believed—still believes, that on that wild October night, he played with the devil for the preacher's soul—and won.

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Fairy-Gold.

CHAPTER I.

“ For the empty fairy shoon,
 Hollow rath and yellow leaf;
 Hands unkissed to sun or moon:
 My grief—my grief ! ”

IT struck four as Hasleton passed St. James's Palace from his studio and turned into the Mall. He walked slowly, lost in thought, from which, as he passed through the gate, he suddenly aroused himself. Some wistful quality of beauty in the winter evening had at length penetrated his pre-occupied brain, and he awoke with a start to its loveliness. Twilight had fallen, and through the Park railings he saw the faintly gleaming lake, and the bare, motionless trees surrounding it, dreamily muffled in mist soft as the ghost of velvet. A faint light of sunset lingered in the west, and stained with dim rose the veil of purple haze in which earth was shrouded. Above the trees, the moon, a disc of pinkish copper, dreamily floated. The lamps in the Mall and on the other side of the Park made a ring of flame round the enchanted, mist-filled space, and in the distance, points of red and purple will-o'-the-wisp fire flitted ceaselessly between the trees.

“ ‘ Like dragon-flies the hansoms hover,’ ” Hasleton repeated with a smile, half aloud.

He paused a moment to glance at the huge, towering building across the water, a hideous eyesore by day, but so transfigured by its veil of mist and moonlight that it might have been some frowning castle of romance, with twinkling lights at faery casements. On the bridge which spans the lake he stopped once more, and stood leaning against the rail, touched by the melancholy, poetic beauty with which all the world was clothed as with a garment. London had merely drawn her magic, vaporous robe about her, to be at once the lovely city of a dream.

The roar of distant traffic fell soothingly upon his ears, like the sound of waves beating upon a rock-bound coast, and heightened the sense of isolation he experienced.

A weird rustle of wings came across the pale water, and a sudden melancholy bird-call from the sedge-fringed bank pierced the silence. It was broken again a moment later by the sound of distant footsteps, which grew more distinct as he stood idly listening.

Before long, at the end of the bridge, a dim form, which he recognized presently as that of a girl, came into sight. She walked hesitatingly, casting rapid glances from right to left.

Once she paused and seemed about to turn back, then suddenly she stopped, and leant against the rail of the bridge at a little distance from Hasleton, and stood motionless, gazing straight before her.

The moonlight was stronger now, though it filtered still through a pall of mist. Hasleton wondered whether it was only the unearthly beauty of the night that had the effect of making the outline of her face so mysteriously attractive. The luminous haze enveloped her slight figure and encircled her head like the faint shadow of a nimbus, an effect which a cloud of moonlit hair, under the little flat cap she wore, served to heighten.

He scanned her face curiously. She had stopped quite close to him, and they were practically alone; yet as he looked he could not fail to believe that her unconsciousness was no elaborate affectation. She had been arrested, as he had been, by the weird effect of the mist-covered gleaming water, and if as she set foot on the bridge she had even noticed him, she had already forgotten his existence. A curiosity to see her full face held him motionless, and presently, with a half sigh, she turned and saw him standing there, and raised her head.

He gave an imperceptible start of surprise. The impression produced by her profile was startlingly contradicted by the eyes she lifted to his, and the effect was almost as disconcerting as if some pale pictured saint, with down-bent head, had turned from her place on the church wall and looked at him with an elfin face. The meek Madonna of a moment ago had disappeared, and he thought involuntarily of the "belle dame sans merci."

She examined his face for a moment, walked on a few steps, and then looked back over her shoulder.

"I suppose you don't know the way to Breamfield's Buildings, do you?" she asked. "I'm so good at losing my way."

"By the river—in the Chelsea neighbourhood, you mean? Yes, I do. I had a studio there once. It's a long way, and

difficult to find from here." He stopped a moment. She still stood in the same pretty pose of arrested movement, her face half turned towards him, her eyes provokingly hidden.

"I'm going towards Chelsea. May I show you?" he asked suddenly, and a moment later wondered why he had asked her.

"Oh, yes, if you're sure it's no trouble." The words were uttered quite casually, with a slight, curious accent, whether a touch of brogue, or other dialect he could not determine.

They were leaving the bridge when she turned and looked back.

"That's nice, isn't it?" she said, and pointed vaguely right and left.

The movement brought her face again in profile, and he was struck by its sadness, an impression which had hardly time to print itself upon his mind before, as she flashed round, he caught again the half-mirthful gleam of her eyes.

"Beautiful!" he returned. "What a travesty of it one will make—trying to paint it."

"Are you going to try?" She laughed a little.

"Oh, I daresay," he said carelessly. "I'm rather fond of mist and moonshine."

"It's an unsubstantial taste, and it doesn't pay," she returned.

He looked down at her rather curiously.

"Has the iron already entered into your soul?"

"It is necessary, isn't it—if one wants the gold to enter into one's pockets?" she said, with a little shrug.

He laughed without replying, and looked at her again as she walked with swift, noiseless feet at his side.

There was silence, broken only by a word or two from time to time. Hasleton stole many glances at the girl's half-averted face, and mentally confessed his inability to place her.

She was unobtrusively, even somewhat poorly dressed, but there was no hint of the nervousness of an inferior in her manner. She was silent, but her silence rather betokened absorption in her own thoughts than lack of conversation.

"We are getting somewhere near the Buildings, aren't we?" he said presently, when they had walked some distance along the Embankment. "I thought they were all let out as studios?"

She started at the sound of his voice, as though wakened from a dream, and looked rapidly about her.

"Yes—so they are, but I live in mine. Why, we're quite close. I'm afraid I've dragged you miles out of your way; I wasn't thinking. Will you come in and have some tea?"

They had turned up a narrow side street, and she paused before one out of a block of rather crazy-looking houses.

He tried, as he thanked her, to make his acceptance as much a matter of course as her invitation had seemed.

"It's right at the top—I ought to have warned you—and also that the fire may be out," she added, as she ran before him up the dark, rickety staircase.

Hasleton arrived at the landing of the sixth story, somewhat out of breath, to find her fitting a key in the lock of the door which faced the top of the stairs.

"You don't mean to say stairs *try* you—isn't that the right expression?" she asked, with a mocking glance over her shoulder as the door opened.

He followed her into a low bare room. A large window faced him, and overhead there was a skylight, and the square of mysterious blue it enclosed was sown with stars. The room was nearly dark, for the fire had burnt to a dull red mass. Out of the window, which filled most of the opposite wall, Hasleton saw tall buildings shrouded in misty blue and a dimly discerned network of masts and cordage. Here and there a stationary red light shone like a star entangled in the mesh, or moved slowly at the prow of a barge, its crimson ray crossing the thousand other shafts of yellow light which quivered in the deep water. He uttered an exclamation of delight and hurried to the window, where he stood looking out.

The girl flung herself down before the fire and stirred it vigorously. It sprang into sudden flames, which leapt and danced and threw flashes of ruddy light far and wide about the room.

Turning presently, Hasleton saw an uncarpeted floor with a cheap mat laid here and there, a half-drawn gay-coloured chintz curtain partially revealing a little white bed, and an untidy stack of canvases. An easel was pushed against one wall, and on a table opposite there were a number of fantastic objects over which the firelight played bewilderingly. His eyes, however, were drawn from them to the figure of the girl crouching on the hearth. She had thrown off her cap and cloak, and he was struck first by her wonderful hair. It was fair and soft and feathery, and hung like a golden mist round her small face, too odd and irregular to be beautiful, yet full of the provocative charm which beauty rarely possesses. When she rose presently, with a sudden movement, from her knees, he noticed her tiny, child-like figure, slight and erect as the swaying reeds which fringe a moorland lake.

"That will do!" she exclaimed, and put the kettle on the fire. "It won't be long boiling. I hope you don't mind biscuits?" She paused with her hand on the tin, and turned her big eyes full upon him. "I've no butter."

Hasleton smiled, professed himself entirely devoted to Huntley & Palmer, and took the chair she indicated on the side of the fireplace opposite the window.

"No, you can't help me—you don't know where anything's kept," she declared, and he rested his head against the back of the chair, and his eyes wandered from the marvellous misty blue outside to the big firelit room and her moving figure, now revealed in startling distinctness by a ruddy flash, now almost blotted into the surrounding darkness as, for a moment, the flame sank.

A half smile hovered about his lips as he thought of the nature of his reflections earlier in the afternoon, and compared them with his present surroundings. He was, besides, a little curious, and altogether rather disposed to enjoy the situation.

"There! shall we have the lamp, or do you like the firelight best? I do," she added, with an odd little tone of decisiveness.

"The firelight, by all means," Hasleton declared with a laugh, intended for her last words.

He drew his chair a trifle nearer to the tiny table, spread with a flowered cotton cloth, and she passed him his tea.

"What a curious cup!" he exclaimed, and held it where the firelight flashed upon it. "It is beautiful!" he added in surprise, raising his eyes to hers—"and very old, surely?"

"Hundreds of years—I don't know how old," she said, and held her own cup, empty as yet, for him to see the monstrous imps and impossible dragons rioting inside, glorious in green and melting purple.

Hasleton examined it with interest.

"It is beautiful," he repeated, and put the cup into her hand, noticing incidentally, as her fingers closed round it, how tiny and fragile they were and how delicately white.

"I don't know where they came from. They've been in our family for years," she said, sipping her tea gravely and looking into the fire. He wondered for the fortieth time who she could be to have a "family," and hands like hers, and live alone in a garret, and then remembered that it was the dawn of the twentieth century, and ceased to marvel.

"I begin to believe I am bewitched," he began with a smile. "Look at that impossible blue yonder"—with a nod towards the window—"and this odd room full of firelight and shadows.

And here I sit drinking tea out of a priceless cup, 'hundreds of years old,' opposite a fairy—in London. It's absurd!"

She turned her head sharply.

"Who told you I was a fairy?" she asked a little breathlessly.

Her lips were parted, and her short upper lip revealed a row of small white teeth. Her eyes were grave, but full of a curious light. Whether it betokened laughter, Hasleton could not determine.

He started—the question was so sudden.

"I *might* be, you know," she went on, before he had time to recover. "I come from Ireland—and we believe in the fairies in Ireland. Why, there was a woman burnt to death the other day, wasn't there, because her husband believed in the fairies?"

"Do you believe in them?" Hasleton asked, half laughing.

"Do *you*?" she asked quickly, and kept her eyes on his face.

"I didn't before this afternoon," he returned, with gravity; "but I confess that my scepticism has been somewhat seriously shaken this last half-hour."

She continued to look at him silently for a moment, and to free himself from her somewhat embarrassing scrutiny he rose.

"I am consumed with curiosity to see what is on that easel—may I?"

She moved, put a taper in the fire, and lighted the lamp which stood on the top of a high chest of drawers, just over her head.

"I don't think it will interest you," she said indifferently, but, holding the light high, crossed the room to where the easel stood.

She was right—it did not.

Hasleton gazed politely at texts painted in black letters upon long strips of canvas, the borders embellished with conventional devices of anchors and crosses linked with florid scrolls of flowers.

He looked at one or two blankly with a vague feeling of disappointment, which he felt was in some way ludicrous. He wondered what he had expected, and in any case what it mattered. It was a trifle incongruous perhaps, but wholly commendable that the girl should get her living by such highly respectable means as illuminating texts for evangelical mission-rooms.

"They are for the 'Sailors' Home of Rest,'" she announced demurely, as if in answer to his thoughts.

Hasleton glanced sharply round, but she was perfectly grave.

"I have a great many," she went on communicatively, turning over the pile against the wall.

"These are for the G.F.S.—do you know what that is?—and these are for the 'Beggars' Bethel.' I had rather a large order to-day, too, from a 'Spare Moments' league in Soho. I was coming back from the place when I met you."

She spoke in a business-like tone, and glancing at her Hasleton once more experienced an irrational pang of disappointment.

"And—er—they pay pretty well, I suppose?" he asked, turning from the easel, his eyes wandering vaguely in search of his hat.

"Fairly—yes. I tried High Church first, but that didn't pay at all."

Hasleton was privately not surprised.

"I couldn't get rid of this, you see," she went on carelessly, and lifted a canvas from the floor and put it over the texts on the easel.

Though his surprise at her inability to part with it was not diminished, he started, glanced hastily from the sketch to her face, then at the texts with which the room was strewn, before he fixed his attention once more on the picture.

He looked a long time. When he raised his head she was sitting on a low stool gazing into the fire as though she had forgotten him.

He crossed the room and took the chair opposite to her.

"You are an exasperating little creature!" he began softly, with a half smile. "Why did you play that trick on me?"

"Trick?" she repeated, raising her eyebrows. "There is no trick. I found the other wouldn't do, so I tried this"—she indicated the texts—"that's all."

He was silent a moment.

"Come and tell me how you got this effect—this gleam behind the kneeling figures." He had risen, and was standing before the easel as he spoke. "Where did you see that look on the face of the Christ? I don't wonder that they will have none of it," he went on. "It's hardly human—you know that? Almost grotesque; and when you have chosen such a subject, too! What is it for—the panel of an altar, I suppose? Well, it's uncanny, and one doesn't expect sacred pictures to be uncanny—it's rather a shock. It's—it's as though some elf-creature had wanted to say its prayers, but didn't quite know how."

"Perhaps it did—want to say its prayers, I mean," she said, in an even voice. She had not followed him, but still kept her seat by the fire, and he could not see her face. She rose presently, however, and came and stood beside him.

"It's full of faults," he went on critically, "but it's abomin-

ably clever. Who taught you to paint?" he suddenly turned round to ask.

She did not reply at once, and then it was with a laugh.

"I thought you said I was a fairy—doesn't that explain?"

"There's no other explanation possible, I believe," he returned emphatically.

"How do you like my goblins?" She suddenly flashed the light away from the easel on to the table, where Hasleton remembered noticing a crowd of little dark objects.

He picked one up curiously, looked at it, laughed and set it down, and turned wonderingly to another and then to a third.

"How in the name of goodness—or the other thing—do you make them?" he exclaimed.

"Gesso—painted," she returned laconically.

"But—how did you come to imagine them?"

She laughed.

"I've seen them—lots of times. So would you if you sat all alone at the door of a cabin on a great wide, misty moor, with a yellow moon rising."

He was examining them closely one after another.

"They are portraits, I believe," he said at last, "or rather there is only one face with every conceivable kind of contortion. They are all different at the first glance, but in every one—yes—one can trace a curious resemblance to the last. Have all the moorland sprites one type of face?"

She started slightly when he began to speak, and then shot a half-admiring glance at him.

"You are rather quick," she allowed. "They are very unlike after all." There was a pause before she spoke again. "Didn't the old cathedral builders make their dearest friends peep out of stone cornices and water-spouts? What a relief to their feelings it must have been," she went on reflectively, "working high up near the clouds, all alone perhaps—and afterwards, to think of those faces with their masks off, for ever up there, grinning at the sky!"

"It's just as well for your morals you are not a mediæval worker in stone," Hasleton observed, glancing furtively at the girl.

"Oh! gesso would do just as well for the matter of that," she returned carelessly.

"Is there a market for these as well as for the texts?" he asked after a moment. "What do you do with them?"

"I sell them. An obscure curiosity-shop I know takes a good many. There's quite a furious little *diablerie* rage amongst a

certain set just for the moment—wax effigies for sticking pins in, and burning, you understand—and so on."

"And when it dies out you'll make wax cherubs or bead-mats, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! I'm quite willing to minister either to the flesh or the devil, whichever pays best," she returned, with a shrug. "But then I don't belong to the world, you see."

"I really don't believe you do," Hasleton said slowly, looking at her.

She sat on the little stool close to the hearth again, and looked at him askance with bright eyes from under her cloud of fire-lit hair.

"I don't believe you do," he repeated; "but why do you say so?"

She laughed, and glanced restlessly about the room before she replied.

"Go and ask at one of the cottages on Patrick Moor—if you can ever find the place"—she said at last. "The woman who comes to the door will cross herself and look back over her shoulder before she tells you—"

She paused, her glittering eyes fixed on Hasleton's face, and then sprang to her feet without finishing the sentence.

"Faith! I wonder what she *would* tell you!" she exclaimed, with a laugh, rattling the cups and saucers as she began to clear the tea-table.

Hasleton glanced at the uncurtained window—it had been dark for some time.

"I must go," he said, "but I shall come another time. That is, you will let me, won't you? I don't know your name; but never mind, I think I would rather not know, and, after all, it must be *Elf*. Good-bye, Elf. We must meet again."

He put out his hand with a smile, and she took it and laughed, frankly this time, and bade him good-bye.

CHAPTER II.

SOME months later Hasleton was sitting in the same bare room by the open window.

It was a May evening. The river ran gold in the light of the setting sun, and the soft air came in faint gusts, and just stirred the muslin curtains, and lifted here and there a petal of the primroses in a bowl on the window-seat.

His visits to the studio since the winter afternoon when he had

first seen it had been by no means frequent. This was, indeed, only the third time he had climbed the long rickety flights of stairs leading to the room.

Almost before the door had closed upon him, after his first visit, he awoke to a knowledge of his folly, and a doubtful sense of possible injustice to the girl had kept him true to his resolution of making, then and there, an end to an episode in itself somewhat unusual and, as he reflected, not unstimulating.

A chance encounter, however, led to a second firelight tea, from which he came away determined not to yield again to temptation.

He owned to himself that he did not understand the girl; and also that he was quite unable to decide whether she knew and accepted the equivocal position in which she had placed herself. She provoked his curiosity, and tantalised him by appearing always on the point of satisfying it. But after all she gave him no confidence, and, finally, as an upshot of many reflections, he decided to let motives of prudence influence him in the matter.

Possibly the fact that his thoughts had become more painfully occupied than usual, soon after his second meeting with her, assisted his determination. For weeks he had not even thought of her, and then one day, in a mood of idleness, her face rose vividly before him, and, obeying an impulse like that which had led to their acquaintance, he left his studio and sought out the dingy street leading to the Buildings. He found her sitting at the window, in front of a table covered with modelling apparatus. She rose slowly as he came in, and with a gesture held out her clay-covered hands a moment, and then dropped them at her sides with a laugh.

She stood with her back to the window in a long, straight, blue pinafore, her hair, with the sunlight in it, a mist of gold round her small head, her face in deep shadow.

"Saint or sprite—I don't know till I see your face better," Hasleton said lightly. Then, as he caught her smile—"Sprite," he declared emphatically, taking a chair on the other side of the table. She sat down and went on with her work at once, apparently without a trace of surprise at his appearance.

"I was expected, evidently," he began. He felt already the spell of her presence beginning to work. Her *insouciance*, absolute and unexpected as everything else about her, piqued his curiosity more than usual.

"What a stupid question to ask a fairy!" she returned, pulling out to a grotesque length the ears of a gnome she was fashioning. She had accepted his designation with a show of such perfect good

faith, that Hasleton found himself wondering sometimes whether, ridiculous though the idea might seem, she believed him to be serious. At all events, they had arrived at a make-believe of the truth of her supernatural origin, and it had amused him to allow conversation to be conducted on this assumption.

"May I have a cigarette?" he asked, taking the case out of his pocket, with a momentary pause for her permission. He made no comment upon the time which had elapsed since his last visit. It was quite unnecessary; she would not expect it, he knew. Her charm for him made itself felt in his knowledge that it *was* unnecessary. To talk to her was almost like talking to a dweller in another world, after all, so complete was her possible ignorance, or at any rate utter disregard, of the conventionalities of this.

"Goblins still up?" he said, throwing the match out of the window.

She nodded.

"What is the matter?" she inquired calmly, with startling directness.

Hasleton raised his head with a swift movement of surprise, met her eyes, and then glanced from them to the sunlit river.

"Nothing that an elf understands—fortunately," he returned, with an attempt at lightness.

"It is always as well to get the fairies on your side if possible," she replied gravely. "They are capricious, of course. Sometimes they don't care to help. Sometimes—though it is a profound secret—they can't, but at any rate it is never wise to ignore them."

Her fingers moved swiftly while she talked. She was at the moment putting an absurd little red tongue into the open mouth of the sprite she held.

Hasleton watched her in silence.

"I believe you are right," he said suddenly. "It will bore you, but I'm going to tell you a dull little story, Elf. Listen attentively.

"There was once a mere boy (his ridiculous age, I believe, was twenty-one) who imagined himself in love with a girl. She was young, rich, pretty, and devoted to the boy. They married, and their friends told one another that it was an excellent match. Do you know what an excellent match means? . . . You don't make them in Elf-land, I believe. . . . Time went on, and the boy, in spite of superhuman efforts at self-deception, began to wonder where his passionate love for the girl was going. Slowly but surely it was evaporating—he could not prevent it—and one day he turned at bay and owned to himself that it was gone.

"Now, unfortunately, Elf," he went on after a moment, "in spite of all pretence to the contrary, we mortals have hearts. You, being an elf, don't know what a heart is, of course? Well, it is an awkward thing to deal with, especially when it's someone else's.

"The poor little girl had given hers once for all into the very unworthy boy's keeping—and didn't want it back again; and, though he would have given worlds to return it to its rightful owner, he couldn't. Why, do you think? Because, incredible and ludicrous as it may seem, it was impossible to see her suffer."

He paused, and absently broke off the ashes of his cigarette against the rim of the flower-bowl in the window.

The girl went on working busily, her eyes intently fixed on the figure she was moulding.

"So at last the boy grew to be a man, and still went on pretending to care for the woman he had promised to love and cherish as long as they both should live," he said at last drearily. "She was not a very clever woman, perhaps, and it was easier, than it might have otherwise been, to deceive her, but as the years went on he found the strain harder to bear, and he felt more than ever that he had missed most of the joy of life. Worse than this, he began to think that he might have spared his pains, and not set down the cup untasted after all, for slowly, in a sort of dazed fashion, his wife was waking to the truth, and when she did"—he jerked the end of his cigarette over his shoulder and out of the window—"when she did, his years of pious fraud would count for nothing, of course."

He leant forward on the table between them, with a half-laugh.

"What a dull little story to tell a fairy!" he exclaimed. "Tell me one now—a very amusing one, imported straight from Elfland."

"I think I'll finish yours," she returned, glancing sideways at him through her hair, a trick he had learned to expect. It was an odd, half-human trick, and it was that, partly, which had led to his pretence of disbelief in her human origin. To-day her look was that of a beautiful forest animal, half-frightened, half-amazed at a caress, and yet, lurking in the depths of her wide eyes, for a transitory second, he caught the gleam of something which, for want of a better descriptive term, he characterised as devilish. It was uncanny, certainly, but it set his heart beating faster.

"So the man went to consult a fairy," she began, after a

moment, in her airy, half-mocking voice, "for he had been told that, though, of course, the elves have no hearts"—she laughed derisively—"yet they can work charms whereby poor stupid mortals who have, can either win back their wives' trust in their affection, or——"

She paused, leaving the sentence unfinished, her lips parted in a half smile, her eyes hidden.

He leant towards her.

"Or——, Elf?"

She broke into a laugh in which there was no mirth—the sort of laugh you hear echoing over a whispering lake on a misty night, he assured her afterwards.

"Never question the fairies over-much," she cried, springing to her feet. "They don't like it. I told you, didn't I, that they were capricious? How many times do you want the same thing repeated?"

She stamped her foot impatiently, and stood opposite to him with hands clenched and eyes gleaming.

Hasleton rose in surprise. The strange little being was really angry. He attempted some soothing words which she cut short with a gesture.

"Go and sit down!" she cried peremptorily. "You have made me angry—you must wait till I get better."

Her voice trembled, and, as she whisked away from the table, he fancied her eyes were brighter for two tears—and then, half whimsically, that he was mistaken, for the elves never wept.

The idea troubled him, nevertheless. With difficulty he restrained a longing to follow and take her in his arms, and at the same moment came involuntary consternation at the vehemence of the impulse. How was it that until this hour he had never thought of her but as a provoking, beautiful child?

There was quiet for a few minutes. Hasleton smoked in silence, watching the girl, who wandered restlessly about the room, making a pretence of putting away some of her modelling tools.

"Well!" she broke out at last petulantly, "you came to me for charms, and you shall have them. But I don't say my spells—I sing them."

She was lifting the lid of a big chest while she spoke, and before the sentence was finished she had taken a guitar from its depths. It was tied with a piece of faded green ribbon, which, when she flung it over her shoulder, kept the instrument in place.

Hasleton raised himself curiously in his chair.

"You sing——" he began.

"Be quiet," she commanded under her breath, with a prohibitive movement of her disengaged hand, and he leant back with a smiling shrug.

She touched the strings and tuned the keys a moment, and then, crossing the room, stood leaning against the corner of the window.

It was dusk, but he could just distinguish the outline of her slight figure, and her down-bent head, with its cloud of hair touching the curve of her neck.

There was a pause, while she idly struck a soft chord, now and again. Sounds of muffled footsteps, voices and laughter, from the street below floated up vaguely to the quiet room. The sunset died lingeringly in the west, and the light wind had sunk, and no longer stirred the primrose petals in the window. The mysterious sweet sadness of the spring made its presence subtly felt through the out-of-door world, straying with its scarcely defined violet scent through the open window.

The girl lifted her head presently and began to sing.

After the first note Hasleton's cigarette hung forgotten in the hand he dropped at his side.

She sang low at first, like a mother crooning a lullaby to her child. The words she sang he had never heard before. They seemed to be snatches of wild old songs, with curious refrains and repetitions, set to a wistful air, which seemed the expression of the undefinable, tender melancholy of the season.

Her voice, he thought, was sweet as the scent of flowers turned to singing. She ceased as suddenly as she had begun, but before he could speak, she had broken into a high ringing key, flinging out with lightning swiftness words which, despite their clear sound, were unintelligible to him. There was an undercurrent of almost uncanny mirth in the song, which ended in a rush of high notes, like shrill laughter. The effect in the silent, dusky room was sufficiently startling, and Hasleton rose swiftly to his feet.

"You are a witch, or a sprite, or something unaccountable," he said with a long breath. "Where did you learn to sing? Why didn't you tell me you could? Sing again, but, for Heaven's sake, sing something human!"

He was quite close to her, and he put out his hand to see if she would disappear at a touch, as he explained, but she stepped aside.

"We don't weave our spells all at once," she told him. "Now don't you think you'd better go and see if the charm is working

at home?" she added, laughing as she bent over the green ribbon to unfasten it from her shoulder.

He was silent.

"Yes, I think I will go," he said presently. He turned at the door and looked back at her. She was standing in the middle of the room under the skylight watching him. "Good-bye," he murmured again.

She did not reply, and he closed the door slowly after him.

He had reached the landing of the first dark flight of steps, when, looking up, he saw her leaning over the rails, still watching him.

"Come again!" she called, "and I'll try another charm which may prove successful if this fails!" Her face glimmered a moment above him, white in the dim light from the pane of glass overhead; then, before he could reply, it disappeared. He heard her laugh as the door banged, and he groped his way down in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

SHE was painting texts when he went in next day, and received him with cool politeness. His attempts at talk were in every instance checked by the tone of her replies, which, though always to the point and in themselves affording material for conversation, were in some undefined fashion utterly out of key—at variance with the mood in which he had come to her.

He reflected angrily upon the number of times his pulses had been stirred by the thought of this day's visit, and presently rose with the sensation of having received a shower bath of tepid water.

"I'm afraid I destroy the scriptural atmosphere," he said with a frosty smile, putting out his hand for farewell. "I think I like goblins best—but one must put trade before everything, I quite agree."

They shook hands with praiseworthy conventionality.

"Yes; I find the texts so engrossing," she answered, in the manner of a female platform-speaker interviewed on the subject of the franchise. She took up her paint-brush again almost before the words were uttered, and Hasleton moved somewhat stiffly towards the door.

As the handle turned she looked up.

"Come on Saturday," she said, "and we'll have strawberries and cream."

She bent her head immediately over her work, as though she

neither expected nor desired a reply, and he went out and shut the door.

He walked on mechanically when he reached the street, his mind full of the girl. As yet he shrank from analysing his own feelings. He only knew that he thought of her almost ceaselessly, and neither wished to explain the fact nor to reflect upon whither it was leading him. A fit of recklessness was upon him. Life had given him very little, he said bitterly to himself. He was tired of walking a straight, monotonous, featureless road ; a by-path lured him with glimpses of mystery in enticing curves and windings, with here a bare, fantastic thorn-bush stretching weird hands—here a drift of flowers. He had walked some distance in a contrary direction before he remembered that he had promised that afternoon to look in at the studio of a brother-artist.

Bryanston was a man he knew only slightly, and vaguely disliked. He could assign no particular reason for this sense of uncongeniality, and, at any rate, he very frankly admired the man's work.

He pulled out his watch with a start when the recollection of the engagement seized him, and promptly hailed a passing hansom. Twenty minutes later he was put down in a quiet road in the south-west district, opposite Bryanston's studio, and was admitted almost at once by the man himself, palette and brushes in hand.

Hasleton almost immediately became absorbed in studying sketches for pictures.

He had not seen any of Bryanston's work for some considerable time, and as he went slowly round the room, and afterwards turned over leaf after leaf of a portfolio, he was struck afresh by the strength of the drawing and the masterly composition of his sketches, and also by a certain quality of hardness in his methods, which always checked his complete admiration for the genius of the man. As he glanced round the studio the thought struck him that, possibly, in the hardly defined quality of brutality expressed in his work, lay the secret of what he felt so repellent in the man as to prevent any possibility of friendship between them.

"You've done a lot since I saw you last," he remarked presently, after some preliminary criticism and comment. "Been away, haven't you?"

"Yes; I was away all last summer—found a new place, miles off the track of everything, you know. Desolate—great heavens!"—he shrugged his shoulders with a laugh—"but

suggestive in an odd way. Look at this." He dragged out a canvas.

A low, sagging sky; a pond, with cold silver light upon it, reed-fringed, set in miles of brilliant bogland turf. There was nothing else in the picture, but Hasleton whistled softly below his breath.

"You're right—desolate isn't the word," he said presently. "Ireland?"

"Yes—in the west. Railways unknown, of course."

Hasleton put the picture down and rose to go. "The sort of place Elf must have come from," had been his involuntary thought at the first glimpse of the sketch, and the idea was in his mind when he moved towards the door, and stopped dead before a canvas on the wall, hanging in the shadow of a thick curtain.

"What's this?" he asked, looking over his shoulder at Bryanston, who had followed him. "It's the same place, isn't it? Who's the girl?"

"Same God-forsaken spot," Bryanston assented. "The girl seems to suit, doesn't she? Oh, she was an odd little soul who lived up there—most appropriately. I got to know her a little."

He took up his brushes and began to work on his half-finished picture. Hasleton sat down on the corner of a table near the door and waited.

"She really was an interesting study," he went on presently, putting in dabs of white paint, "and had a story delightfully in harmony with her surroundings—in its mistiness, so to speak. Her parentage was vague—you will understand I gleaned all this from the people in the few shanties round about, who were charmingly mediæval in their outlook. The Irish peasant is mediæval, of course."

"Yes; but the girl?" Hasleton inquired in as idle a tone of curiosity as he could command.

"Well, her father was an eccentric old man, a scholar, suspected vaguely of practising the black arts by the people round, I believe. About twenty-five years ago, it seems, he apparently dropped from the clouds with his books and a very beautiful young woman, and took up his abode in an old dilapidated farmhouse which had been empty for ages. It had belonged to some of his forebears, I think; but I'm vague about that. From the description of her, I should imagine that the lady, who seems to have been enveloped in a cloud of mystery—that's the right way of putting it, isn't it?—meaning, of course, that she was popularly supposed not to be the man's lawfully wedded wife—was Italian by birth. The people declare she talked gibberish;

she had been heard to sing unintelligible, and therefore unholy, songs in a voice which 'indade belonged to no mortal whatever.' Of course she was possessed of the Evil One—to see that you had only to 'look at the eyes av' her'—and I should have liked the chance, for they seem to have made a great impression."

He paused a moment to mix some paint with his palette knife.

"Fortunately, as I believe, she bequeathed them to her daughter, so they are not entirely lost to the world."

Something in the man's tone caused Hasleton's grasp on the bar of the chair in front of him to tighten considerably.

"Naturally, when the baby came, it could be no other than a changeling," Bryanston continued in the same tone. "If you gossip long enough with some of the women at the peat fire, you'll hear of the unearthly laughter Kate Meagher heard the night of the child's birth, and something about the white horse and its rider which Mike O'Hara met on the moor, and also how the godless scholar drove away with scorn the holy father who had come to baptize the child and perform the last rites for the mother."

"She died, then?"

"Died—or went to her own people—however you like to put it," Bryanston returned drily. "The child lived, and as she grew up, I imagine, she did nothing to lessen the belief in her fairy origin. On the contrary, if hearsay may be trusted, she was the queerest, most uncanny of changeling children. Her father taught her 'book-larnin'," and she instructed him further in the black arts, till she was grown-up—eighteen, or thereabouts. When he died, she went on living at the old house alone, except for an old Scotch servant who had been her nurse. And there she was still living when I met her last year," he added. He put down his brush and strolled across the room, whistling softly, apparently in search of something.

"What was she like?" Hasleton forced himself to ask the question carelessly, standing with his back to the man, apparently studying the sketch on the wall.

"Interesting," Bryanston returned dispassionately, going on with his work. "And upon my word I don't wonder at the old wives' tales," he added. "No doubt she had heard from her childhood upwards rumours about her mother and herself. Perhaps as a child she believed them, and they produced the exact supernatural indications the neighbours looked for. I don't know"—he shrugged his shoulders—"at all events, she was quite freakish enough to maintain their delusion."

"They were afraid of her, then?"

"Yes—in a way. Yet it was wonderful what they'd let her do, after all. I've seen her go into one of their miserable little cabins to look after a sick child. They left all the nursing to her, and then went in and sprinkled water over the child, and made the sign of the cross, and trusted to Providence, I suppose. How she used to laugh at the holy water!" Bryanston smiled a little at the corner of his mouth at the recollection.

"You ought to have seen the parlour in the farmhouse," he went on presently. Hasleton was struck with the persistent way in which he recurred to the subject. "Such a collection of musty old books on shelves, window-seats, tables—all over the place—you never saw. Sixteenth-century philosophy—Greek—Latin—old sea-charts, and here and there, quaintly enough, a modern French novel. Then there was all the girl's painting tackle; that was odd enough, too, in all conscience." He laughed softly to himself.

"Oh! she was a painter?" Hasleton asked mechanically, still staring at the figure on the wall.

"Well, not exactly. She had a surprising talent though. I gave her a hint or two now and again," he returned abstractedly, stepping back, palette in hand, to survey his work.

"What is she doing now?" He turned his back on the sketch and crossed the room to fetch his hat.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"God knows!" he replied. "Telling the children outlandish tales while they sit round her with their mouths wide open. Singing Kathleen O'Brien's baby to sleep, perhaps, with such a lullaby as you never heard. At any rate, if she isn't behaving like an angel to some good-for-nothing-brute, she's scandalising the neighbourhood. You may be sure of that much."

Hasleton shot a rapid glance at him as he painted, and wondered whether he was lying consciously. He went away wondering.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY had strawberries and cream for tea on Saturday. There was a big bowl of honeysuckle and meadow-sweet on the table, and Elf was in a gay mood.

This time it was Hasleton who failed to respond.

"Will you sing?" he asked presently, when the table was moved aside, and they sat in the bay of the window.

She shook her head.

"I can't—I must raise devils," she said, rising lazily.

"You have done that already!" The words were uttered desperately, and he let his eyes rest on her face.

She returned his gaze steadily for a moment. Then, slowly, the colour rose and overspread her face. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, she broke into a derisive laugh, and turned away to prepare the table for modelling. Hasleton got up from his chair.

"You *shall* listen!" he began in a low, angry voice; "you can go on with your maddening tricks too long. I will not bear it. Listen—you know it already, but I will say it—I love you—I—"

He had put out his hand impetuously, when she turned upon him.

"Don't say another word—not another word—do you hear?" Go away from me! Sit down!"

She spoke in a whisper, but he obeyed her, and she went on with her preparations. She stood with her back to him, but, as she put up her arm to take the things she required from some shelves above her head, he noticed that her hand was trembling.

She began her work in silence, which Hasleton forebore to break. Mechanically he leant forward and took up a little figure from which she was copying. It was one of those he had seen on his first visit to the studio. For a moment or two he examined it carefully, then replaced it on the tray. He definitely recognised the face now, which had only vaguely haunted him some months previously.

He looked at Elf. She was working swiftly, as usual; her face was pale, without a trace of laughter. Her lips drooped at the corners. She looked like a child on the verge of tears.

"Dear little Elf," he began very gently, "I was a brute; but do hear me—"

At his first words her look changed. The old inhuman expression, part elfish caprice, part recklessness, was in the eyes she raised.

"I'm going to tell you a little story," she interrupted, with a clever caricature of his manner on a previous occasion. "It is a dull little story to tell a mortal, but listen."

He put out his hand as though to ward off a blow.

"Don't!" he urged in a tense voice. His face had grown white.

"But I listened to yours," she said imperturbably. "It is only fair that you should hear mine, even though you *are* bored."

"Suppose I know it already?" he murmured.

She glanced at him for a second, then, "You don't," she said with perfect calmness, and almost in the same breath. "There was once a fairy," she began—"remember this is a fairy-story and then you won't be shocked—who lived at the back of beyond. This mere sprite was so incredibly foolish as to have a purpose in life. She might really almost have been a mortal," she went on lightly, "to judge by the ridiculous fashion in which she harped upon her poor little idea. Fairies always harp upon something, you know, but it's generally on a more melodious instrument than an idea. From the time she was changed in the cradle, this anomaly in fairies fancied she was an artist—actually wanted to be a great painter." Her laugh was bitterly human, Hasleton thought, and winced a little as he heard it. "But as she lived at the back of beyond, you see, it was difficult," she continued, "till the inevitable mortal came on the scene. The advent of the mortal is only a question of time in Fairy-land; he comes as inevitably as in real life the fairy prince fails to appear. The mortal could paint, of course—he painted well—and drew better. He encouraged the fairy, and taught her a great deal, and she was full of hope, because the dream of her life was beginning to be realised." There was a moment's pause.

"All at once," she went on in the same tone, "the mortal said he was going away. Before this—many times—he had explained to the fairy that he loved her, and had upbraided her for not having any heart. Imagine upbraiding a fairy for having no heart, as though she could help it! Of course she had no heart—she only wanted to learn painting.

"Can you imagine what a blow it was to her? The mortal was going away, and she lived at the back of beyond and wanted to learn painting."

Beneath her nonchalance Hasleton fancied—perhaps it was only his imagination—a strained anxiety to put the case vividly before him, to enlist his sympathies; but he did not look at her—he sat leaning back in his chair gazing beyond her, out towards the river.

"Well, she thought it over, and finally determined not to lose the one chance she ever had, even though she thought the man's terms extravagant. She left the back of beyond behind her, and crossed the sea with him, and entered real life, and in return he taught her to paint."

There was a considerable silence. Elf's hands moved less quickly before she spoke again with concentrated bitterness.

"But there never was such a ridiculous fairy. She found, because she had no heart, and no soul, of course, she could not

keep to her bargain, even for the sake of learning to paint. She told the mortal this. He was very angry, but he couldn't keep her, because, mad though she had been, she had not perpetrated the incredible folly of binding herself to him for life, according to the custom of mortals. She was free to go, and she went gladly, but she will never learn to paint."

The last words were almost inaudible.

Turning, Hasleton glanced at her, then sprang to his feet, and fell on his knees beside her chair.

She was half fainting; her trembling hands, clasped together, bore witness to the effort she had made to keep her voice steady enough to finish her story.

The sight of her little white face entirely shook his self-command. He covered it and her hands with kisses, murmuring broken words, till she smiled and turned her great eyes full upon him, and softly, almost timidly, touched his hair with the tips of her fingers.

"Elf, I knew it before," he cried incoherently—"you dear child, I knew it, only I didn't think you had been so brave. I thought —never mind what I thought!—we two will go back to Fairyland together. You and I, Elf. We will let everything else go. What does it all matter? I love you."

He had flung the window wider open to give her more air, and the warm wind shook a rose from the bowl on the window ledge. It fell on to her lap. She picked it up, looked at it a moment, then suddenly kissed it, and, with a little tender laugh, brushed it across his lips.

CHAPTER V.

HASLETON walked towards Breamfield's Buildings along the Embankment next day.

He was harassed and perplexed, and his face, lined and drawn as it was, betrayed his mental disquietude. He entirely failed to analyse his own feelings; he did not even know whether he regretted the impulse which, on the previous day, had so completely swept him out of the current of self-control, and committed him into taking an irrevocable step. If she were only a little more human, less bewilderingly freakish, he thought, it would be easier to find a clue to his real emotions. As it was, he could neither reason nor deliberate; he was only conscious of an overwhelming desire to see her once more. Their parting had been a strange one, and he felt vaguely uneasy as he recalled it,

though he told himself that it meant nothing, since she was always as variable as an April day.

He was at the entrance of the Buildings now, and all thought was merged in the consciousness that in a moment he would be face to face with her. Three minutes later he was knocking at the door of her studio. There was no reply; he waited a moment, then turned the handle and went in. The room was empty—swept and garnished. The afternoon sunlight flooded the bare boards and crept half-way up the dismantled walls. Everything was gone—the little curtained bed, all the simple furniture; the windows were open, and from below came a hum of many voices, a rattle of carts, the shouts of newspaper boys crying evening editions.

Hasleton crossed the room like a man in a dream and sank upon the window-seat.

“Fairy-gold, in the hand dead leaves,” beat out its monotonous cadence in his brain. For a long time he sat motionless, gazing at the empty wall opposite, then, painfully, thought came back.

She had gone—vanished as though she were indeed the sprite of his waking dreams.

Dimly, in thought, he traced the last hour he had spent with her. He remembered how as he rose to go she stood motionless in the middle of the room, watching him, and how when he turned to the door she ran into his arms and held him close a moment, and then pushed him from her, with a travesty of her old maddening laugh.

It rang in his ears now, and he started up, goaded almost to frenzy by the sound. He went out on to the landing, pulled the bell, and then re-entered the room, which he began to pace with restless steps.

He was conscious presently, that the doorway was darkened for a moment, and, looking up, he saw the caretaker from downstairs standing on the threshold.

“Where has the lady gone?” he began, turning upon her.

“Indeed, sir, that’s more than I can say,” she replied, with an injured air. “She left sudden this morning, and took everything with her, except a heathenish painting, which she left a-purpose on the table. I put it down there”—she pointed to a canvas in the corner of the room. “Perhaps you know something about it? A creepy, ‘orrid thing I call it. I was glad to turn it to the wall, that I was, and——”

“Did she leave no messages—no address?” Hasleton interrupted impatiently.

“No, sir, nothing.” She hesitated a moment. “She was in

some trouble, I believe, poor thing, but of course you don't know nothing about that," she added, with a sharp glance at him.

Hasleton was silent.

"I come up here last night, thinking she was out, and 'er windows wide open, and it pouring in torrents, as you know, sir, and there she was, lyin' in that window-seat, where you're sitting now, sobbin' fit to break 'er 'eart. Upon my word, somehow I was rightly scared, I don't know why. She wasn't a crying sort, as you might say. She didn't 'ear me, and I shut the door quiet an' let 'er be, and this morning you might have thought it was all a dream, the way she spoke, so gay like, when I met her on the stairs; but she looked ill; white as that there paper she was, and—"

Hasleton rose.

"You have no idea where she went, you say? No?" He slipped a coin into her hand, nodded to the door, and she went out, curtseying.

When she was gone he bent down and lifted the picture.

It was the sketch for an altar panel he had seen the first time he came to the room. She had left it for him, that, and no other message. He put it up against the window and looked long at the mysterious face of the Christ. Presently he sank on his knees before the window-seat, where she had crouched the night before, and laid his head on his folded arms. The sound of footsteps echoed ceaselessly on the pavement below, coming out of the distance and fading into the distance again. In fancy, hers mingled with the rest, passing out of his life, on, on to some strange land where he could not follow.

He could only guess what her last night's thoughts had been; but he knew instinctively that she had gone out of his life for ever.

The light had all faded from the room when at last he lifted his head. A chill breeze from the river swept in at the open window and sighed across the empty floor. He lifted the canvas slowly and moved towards the darkness of the outside landing. On the threshold he paused a moment, and looking back over his shoulder, saw through the skylight the stars beginning to glitter.

Then he softly closed the door and entered real life again.

NETTA SYRETT.

The Inexplicable Epidemic.

PRELIMINARY.

[I HAVE before me one of the most tragic documents ever wrung by circumstances from a human pen. It begins : "I, Richard Vancom, being inoculated of a mortal malady of which I shall be infallibly dead in five days or less"—and it ends with a fevered scrawl which cannot be deciphered.

It is, however, only the last few lines of this confession or record which are illegible. The rest (and it occupies twenty-eight closely written pages of foolscap) is in a minute painstaking hand, as clear as copper-plate, with every letter carefully formed—the hand of an accurate plodder, to whom no labour came amiss.

It is absolutely in my discretion whether I publish this statement as it stands, or only part of it, or whether I suppress it altogether. I have decided for three separate reasons simply to place an outline of the story which it contains before the public. My first reason is that the record is a laborious essay largely taken up with technical matter, mainly of interest to the student of bacteriology—and that perhaps a little out of date—and with the minute analysis of the symptoms of a loathsome disease which would be repellent to the general reader. In the second place, as I was to a certain extent acquainted with the writer, I can throw some side-lights on his life and character which are not to be found in the document itself. And, thirdly, the events are still sufficiently recent to make it possible that some of the particulars which are set down as to names and places might give pain to living persons.

It is enough if I say that just twenty-six years ago an epidemic of a character totally unknown to Europe, but of terrible intensity, made its appearance in a working-class quarter of a great manufacturing town in Lancashire. It wrought havoc while it lasted, but probably the conditions were unfavourable to the continued propagation of the new disease—the local tradition being still that

it was brought into the town by a Lascar who had newly landed at Liverpool and come inland, and who was one of the victims. It is also remembered that Dr. Vancom, who had settled in the neighbourhood, fell a martyr to his professional zeal in combating a malady which he alone among the local medical men who were called in even pretended to understand.]

CHAPTER I.

EARLY in one blustering wet December evening, Richard Vancom, surgeon, was sitting alone in what for want of a better term may be called his laboratory. It was a dismal little room on the first floor of a dismal little house at the corner of a long street of workmen's cottages in one of the dreariest districts of one of the dirtiest industrial towns to be found in the north of England. The house differed from those which adjoined it only in being double-fronted instead of single-fronted, and in having a brass plate on the door, setting forth the surgeon's name and quality. In truth the monotony of Eden Street would have been as complete as its squalor if the red and blue lights in the chemist's shop window on the other side of the way had not done something to lend a little cheerfulness and variety to the neighbourhood.

The room in which Richard Vancom was at work was quite in keeping with the general aspect of the house. Uncarpeted, ill-papered, and warmed only by a badly fed gas-stove which stood in the fireplace, it presented about as uninviting an appearance on this stormy night as could well be imagined. There was a file of daily papers in one of the corners, a few shabby books supported each other in a tipsy fashion on a couple of bare deal shelves beside the window, and near where the surgeon was sitting there stood an array of coloured bottles, some of them empty, others half full, all stained and begrimed, looking like a gathering of woe-begone street arabs. Practically, indeed, the only furniture in the place was the big dirty desk with its superstructure of wooden pigeon-holes at which Vancom was sitting. And yet a glance at those pigeon-holes, with their carefully docketed contents, would have told you that the surgeon was a man of method, but apparently too poor or too much absorbed to pay much attention to his surroundings.

On one side of him was a powerful microscope—which looked as if it might be the one object of real value in the whole house—and on the other hand a gas-lamp heavily shaded, which threw a brilliant light on the table, but left the greater part of the room

in practical darkness. In front stood a thick leather case with lock and key, containing a number of small glass tubes. It was through one of these tubes that Vancom was now intently looking straight into the flame of the lamp, which brought his features into sharp relief.

It was not altogether an attractive face to look at, not the sort of face to compel sympathy or suggest good-fellowship. The features were not without a certain amount of regularity, and a woman who had loved the man would have seen beauty in the strong black eyes and the well-pencilled eyebrows. But the eyelids were red, perhaps from constant application, or from the chronic dyspepsia which showed itself in other lines, and the pallor of the surgeon's complexion was accentuated by the short black whiskers which flanked an otherwise clean-shaven face.

The features generally bore no traces such as are left by great sorrow, or commanding cares, or violent emotions. Such lines as there were told rather of hard drudgery, of disappointment, of that slow uphill battle against circumstances which maketh the heart very sick, but is slow to kill for all that. The surgeon looked indeed younger than his years. He might have been thirty-five—he was really turned forty.

The world had not dealt tenderly with Richard Vancom. His father had kept that very chemist's shop on the other side of the way, and by dint not merely of dispensing medicines, but of prescribing freely for small ailments, had made the business prosperous enough. But he was a rough, overbearing, violent man, much given to drink; and he had married a second time late in life mainly because he wanted some one to look after the half-witted boy whom his first wife had borne him, and whom he found it impossible to keep in order simply by the process of repeatedly knocking him down. He did not want the son who was born to him after his second marriage, a fact of which he made no secret either to his new wife or to the neighbours. In fact, he took a strong dislike to the boy from the day of his birth, and the poor anæmic frightened little mother, to whom her son bore a striking likeness in feature, was ever at the end of her feeble wits to protect him from the father's violence.

Ultimately the chemist came to a terrible end through mistaking carbolic acid for whisky in one of his drinking fits, and the business was sold. The bulk of the chemist's savings had been left in trust for the half-witted boy, who was taken in charge by some relatives of the first wife. Richard and his mother were only left a pittance.

Then began years of hard toil and penury both for mother and

son. She worked with her needle, while he became an errand-boy in a doctor's establishment not far away. He was passionately fond of chemistry, of which he had obtained a smattering in his boyhood, and which he continued to cultivate in his spare hours, for no one ever knew Richard Vancom to be idle for a moment even in the most irresponsible years of the ordinary boy's life. In this way he qualified himself to become a dispenser in the doctor's surgery, and by dint of hard work, continued self-denial, and thrift he succeeded—though not until he was well past the usual age—in saving enough to enable him to take the first step on the ladder of the medical profession. His mother died about this time and the sale of their little home helped him on his way. Whether he mourned her or not, no one knows. A capacity for sheer drudgery, and for set unromantic social ambition, were the only qualities which those who came in contact with him in those days thought of accrediting him with.

His fellow-students were at first disposed to make a butt of him for his want of sociability, but they soon gave it up as a bad job. Richard Vancom had the hide of a rhinoceros. It began to be whispered too that he was very clever with his knife, and after a time he became the chosen assistant of a certain distinguished physiologist, whose reputation rested chiefly on his discoveries by vivisection. This was a practice not so well systematised as it is now, and gruesome stories were told of Vancom's own private experiments in this direction. A man may do terrible things for the sake of science, as in war, without incurring a moral taint if when his work is over he leaves it with a feeling of relief, and dismisses the subject from his mind as a thing not to be dwelt upon. But this man without social distractions, with his mind full only of the drudgery of the day, whose very bedroom, according to the gossip of the hospital—which may or may not have been true—had become a storehouse of agonising animal life—what of him?

Still, for all his industry and application, all his superiority to any form of dissipation, Richard Vancom made little progress. Brilliant idlers, clever ne'er-do-wells, who knew nothing but what was likely to serve them in an examination, but had tact enough to master that, passed him easily on the road of life. They took the fences while he was laboriously grubbing along the highway, noting every chip of stone and every blade of grass as he did so. Ultimately, realising that without money or influence, or the knack of social success, he had no chance of making a practice for himself at home, he took a hospital appointment out in India.

Here again his ill-luck pursued him. His health failed to stand the climate, and he came back to England little richer than when he started. He was looking about in despair for a means of living, when the opportunity was offered him of returning to his native town. His half-witted half-brother had outlived the people who originally took him in charge, and he had been going about from lodging to lodging growing steadily more erratic and more frequently violent in his behaviour, until it was hard to induce anyone to harbour him even for the sake of the very liberal allowance—as it would be accounted in the neighbourhood—which the surviving trustee, under his father's will, was able to dispose of in his behalf. It was necessary to place him more or less under restraint, and the trustee, who was growing old, thought that his half-brother, a medical man, might be his best guardian.

Richard Vancom did not hesitate for a moment. Here was a chance of obtaining at least his bread and butter, possibly of building up a practice, certainly of obtaining leisure for researches which—fired by the new scientific theories to which Pasteur and others had given currency—he had begun in India, and on the continuance of which his mind was bent.

The practice had been forthcoming only to a small extent, for the people of the neighbourhood were poor, and older hands were there before him. But at last—at last—in this dreary house in Eden Street, in this room with its dirty walls and uncarpeted floor, he had by dint of strenuous labour brought himself almost to the goal which in India five years before he had set himself to reach, at any labour and at any cost. In that pale yellow tube which he held up to the gas flame, and in another almost colourless tube which lay on the desk beside him, he could read fame and fortune; and he exulted with the moderate exultation of a man who feels that he has won a victory a little too late.

CHAPTER II.

THE surgeon was still occupied with his own thoughts when the door softly opened and a man sidled into the room.

He was a big powerful fellow of middle age, with long fair hair curling down to his shoulders, and a heavy golden beard covering his breast, and with big blue eyes, wide open like those of a child. At a distance or at the first hasty glance he might have passed as a model of manly beauty, but his face would not bear scrutiny. The lips were heavy, pendulous, and quavering, and below the eyes the skin was puffed out in red patches telling of violent passions,

of madness or drink. It was the imbecile half-brother Edward—known to all the street arabs who made mud pies in the neighbourhood of Eden Street as “Neddy”—Vancom.

There was no violence and no manliness in his demeanour now. He crept into the room crouching as a whipped dog, not yet certain it has obtained forgiveness, will do as it approaches its master. His hands hung timidly beside him, and there was a mute appeal in his great childish eyes as he turned them on the surgeon—an ingratiating appeal for a word of welcome or at least of kindness. He was close to the desk before Richard Vancom became aware of his presence—had even placed one trembling hand upon it. Suddenly the surgeon turned round with a look of fury.

“What do you want here?” he demanded in a tone of savage contempt.

The few people who knew Richard Vancom would have refused to believe his voice capable of such an inflexion. And in truth no human being save this one demented creature in the room could have provoked him to an outburst like this. For the great body of his fellow-creatures he felt neither love, nor hate, nor fear, but this half-brother of his was his evil genius—the personification of all the disappointments, the humiliations and the privations of his miserable life. It was this idiot—this slobbering, senseless, crouching brute, who in his boyhood had come between him and his father’s love and, what was more to him, his father’s money—who had made his youth what it was, whose accursed life had up to this day stood between him and the small competency which would otherwise have been his, and have enabled him to cut himself adrift from his present wretched surroundings, and to have worked out his ambitions in circumstances in which he might long since have prospered. Even now, what was he but this man’s keeper and body servant, dependent on his pay for the house which sheltered him, and for the livelihood he had failed to make in other ways? This was the crowning humiliation. Yes, the hatred was deep and capable of all developments. At times, indeed, strange thoughts had crossed the surgeon’s mind—had he not killed and tortured animals whose intelligence was higher than that of this half-human epileptic’s?

A rumour was current in the neighbourhood that Richard Vancom habitually treated his half-brother with savage violence, but that, I believe, was untrue. Violence was not consistent with Vancom’s ordinary frame of mind, even where he hated so genuinely; but there were times when the idiot became a madman, when he had to be controlled by force, and what the surgeon did

in those encounters no one may say. At all events, he had so broken his half-brother's spirit that in the intervals when the frenzy was not on him a mere angry glance, a mere lifting of the surgeon's right hand, would throw him into a paroxysm of terror.

He started back now. But as the surgeon's anger seemed to cool down he gained courage again after a time and moved towards the desk with a sort of sheep-like curiosity.

"What is in that?" he asked.

Vancom turned round with a grim laugh.

"Enough," he said, "to kill a city full of idiots like you. A prick of this lancet dipped in it would make your bones rot and your eyes drop out of your head. It would cover you with festering sores—would make you putrify even before you were dead!"

He enjoyed the look of terror which came into the other's heavy face—it was policy with him to inculcate these fears.

As if from a sudden desire to possess himself of something so terrible, the half-brother stretched out his hand and seized one of the tubes in the leather case.

"Put that down!" shouted the surgeon, and, almost unconscious of what he was doing himself, he lifted the lancet and drove it deeply into the back of his companion's hand. "There, now you have got it," he added, as the blood spurted from the cut.

The imbecile gave a howl of terror, and, burying his wounded hand under his coat, he turned and fled from the room. Vancom heard him moaning and blubbering as he made his way up a flight of stairs to the attic which was his bedchamber. He wiped the point of the lancet and laid it beside him, laughing quietly to himself. He had not over-coloured his description of the contents of the tube which he had been examining. It was the pure cultivation of the bacillus of a terrible disease, still endemic in some parts of the East—a putrid disease, loathsome, virulent, glandular—for the discovery of a prophylactic against which the Indian Government, liberally backed by one or two of the wealthier native princes, had repeatedly offered a heavy reward. But the lancet was innocent enough—Vancom had been using it as a paper-knife.

He put the tube which he had been examining back into the leather case and carefully locked it, and this in its turn he locked in one of the drawers of the desk at which he was sitting. Then from another drawer he produced a packet carefully fastened with ribbon, and out of this he drew a portrait—the portrait of a woman.

Yes, of a woman, and of an attractive one, surely! The face came near to being strictly beautiful, but, if it was not quite so, there was enough in the perfect oval of its contour, in the shapely forehead about which the thick hair clustered heavily, in the large thoughtful grey eyes—grey they must have been—and in the inexpressible tenderness of the lines about the mouth, to invest the features with a tender dignity such as we see sometimes in the portraits of sweet women of the Puritan days. The prevailing cast was sadness, though it was easy to see that the face could light up at times with demure merriment. The woman was probably twenty-two, or she might have been five years older—it was one of those faces which you could be certain look older than they are.

The surgeon placed his elbows on the desk with the portrait between them, and resting his head on his hands he looked at it long and fixedly. His features wore a very different expression now from that which had distorted them in the presence of his half-brother. The hard lines cut in them by years of loveless and sterile labour—for sterile it had been nearly all his life—were too set to relax much, but something seemed to be struggling under the mask which he habitually wore, like a wintry moonbeam through a murky window. It did little more than flicker, however, and the strangely blended expression gave way to the old look of weariness and disappointment—less cold and harsh, perhaps, than usual, but more tragic in its bitterness. Still, the portrait evidently had a fascination for him, and he continued to study it for some time longer. At last, with the air of a man accustomed to self-control who was growing ashamed of a sudden weakness, he lifted his elbows from the desk and, replacing the picture in the parcel, re-tied it with a firm hand and restored it to its place.

“Pshaw!” he muttered to himself with a weary laugh. “What have I to do with love-making? What have I to offer to any human being that they should care for me? If Katharine thinks of me at all, she probably believes the gossip of the street—that I spend my time in skinning animals alive, and trying the effect of poisons on that idiot upstairs, and that I came back here to avoid a scandal which made things too hot for me in India. I know these tales, but what have they mattered to me? Or if she does not believe that, she can see enough of what I really am to scorn the idea of sharing such a life as mine, even if her father, who knows me better, would agree. Still, God knows what I might have been with a little love from a good woman—a little sympathy.”

He covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, and then rose with an effort to his feet.

Still he said, "I must have an answer—an answer from her own lips. It is not enough to know to see—as I have plainly seen—what it must inevitably be. I have more work to do yet—much work—and I cannot have a woman's face as a disturbing influence haunting me half my day. Let her say 'No' to me herself and I can dismiss her from my thoughts, burn that photograph, and leave this accursed place without a regret."

He turned to leave the room, but before he did so he picked up an old looking-glass from a dusty shelf, and combed back his hair from his temples, and straightened his black whiskers. It was a piece of attention to personal appearance which Richard Vancom seldom displayed, and he smiled as he realised what he was doing.

"No, I think I will keep the portrait in any case," he murmured as he placed his hat on his head and shut the door of the laboratory after him.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was a high wind and a drizzling depressing rain when the surgeon, with the collar of his overcoat turned up to his ears, emerged into Eden Street. But he had not far to go. The lights of the chemist's shop on the other side of the way were scarcely fifty yards distant, and their red, blue, and yellow glare was as welcome to the wayfarer on this dismal night as the harbour lights to a befogged mariner. One side of the shop threw a band of light across Eden Street, another gave a welcome relief to the short dirty thoroughfare which led to the banks of the canal—mere water now, flecked here and there by a distant lamplight, but a phosphorescent and poisonous-looking sewer under the eye of the daily sun.

Vancom entered the shop with the air of a man who knew his whereabouts. "Mr. Harrop is in, I suppose?" he said, with a nod to the solitary assistant behind the counter.

"Well, no, Doctor," replied the assistant, trying to hide the cigarette he was surreptitiously smoking under the counter; "but you will find Miss Katharine there. The guv'nor will be back in a quarter of an hour."

A minute or two earlier Vancom would have met a tall portly old gentleman with a shock of white curly hair surmounted by a carefully brushed very curly-brimmed hat, who had passed

whistling through the shop. This was the chemist himself, who had succeeded Vancom's father in the business and had become for a time a somewhat intimate friend of the surgeon. The two men had nothing in common except a certain degree of culture and a taste for one or two particular branches of science, some dabbling in which was one of the chemist's recreations. But this in the circumstances in which they were placed was quite sufficient to draw them together. It is wonderful how little differences of temperament, of personal habit, even of opinion, count in such cases against a single common interest.

The evenings spent at John Harrop's were indeed Vancom's only relaxation. And this had only recently come into his life, for he had on his return to Eden Street kept himself aloof from everyone but his few patients. Even after he had struck up a friendship with the chemist he was for a long time only seen at great intervals in the cheerful parlour behind the shop. But of late his visits had been growing more and more frequent until people had begun to talk.

The chemist, too, was getting rather uneasy. He was a widower, but his daughter Katharine, who for three years had kept his house, had taken over the responsibilities of a mother towards her young sister and still younger brother, whose birth had cost Mrs. Harrop her life, and had made his home—which was much to him—as cheerful and cosy as it had been even in his wife's lifetime. He loved her tenderly, and since it had dawned on him that the surgeon's visits might be due to other causes than the attractiveness of his own society, he had begun to look black on his arrival, and only a good-natured dislike to wounding the feelings of his visitor had induced him to go through any form of welcome. He did not want to part with his daughter at all; but in any case Richard Vancom, the hard-up surgeon of doubtful antecedents, was not the man he would have chosen for his son-in-law.

Vancom knew all this and he had never for a moment blinded himself to the hard truth. Still he longed to get his dismissal from Katharine's own lips, and, as it happened, circumstances had played into his hands.

Lifting the flap of the counter, Vancom passed through the little store-room at the back of the shop, and thence into the comfortably furnished brightly lighted sitting-room, the door of which was open. A young woman was sitting sewing at a round table which she had drawn close to the fire, with her feet upon the fender. On the hearth-rug sat a boy of five or six, solemnly engaged in the task of constructing a house out of toy bricks.

The young woman was the original of the photograph. It was easy to see now that the expression of gravity was due less to years—for her complexion was that of a girl—than to house-wifely cares and dignities prematurely assumed.

She rose and held out her hand with a singularly frank and winning smile.

“I am sorry my father is out, Dr. Vancom,” she said, “but he will not be long. Come and take a seat by the fire.”

The surgeon placed his hat and gloves on the table and looked at her gravely.

“I want to speak with you alone,” he said, with a gesture towards the boy before the fire..

Katharine looked a little embarrassed.

“Go into the shop, Ernest, and ask Mr. Simpson for some sweets,” she said, and the suggestion was acted upon in a moment. Then, as she resumed her sewing, she asked, “What has happened?”

There was for a moment or two an awkward pause. The surgeon had rehearsed a dozen times over all that he intended to say, but now that the opportunity had come the carefully prepared sentences stuck in his throat. As men often do when they are calculating their action in a future emergency, he had over-estimated his own powers of self-control. At last, however, he blurted out—

“I have come to tell you, Miss Katharine, that I am going away.”

The girl looked up with interest. Perhaps there was even a trace of anxiety in her face.

“Away,” she said—“for how long?”

“I hope to God,” replied the surgeon with sudden vehemence, “for ever.”

There was another awkward pause and then Vancom continued. He was more master of himself now.

“Forgive me for speaking to you like that. But I have come to-night to ask a favour of you. You are a sensible woman, and I can speak plainly. Miss Harrop, I have been a frequent visitor to your father’s house of late, and you must know, as well as I know, that it has not been for his sake alone that I have come.”

Katharine coloured deeply and looked down at her sewing.

“You must know that as well as I know it,” repeated the surgeon with deliberation, fixing his eyes upon her face and with a note of interrogation in his voice.

Katharine felt that he awaited her reply.

“I have heard my father say so,” she answered hesitatingly.

"Yes, and he has warned you against me," continued Vancom bitterly—"against me, the penniless professional man, the confirmed failure in life, with my bad parentage and doubtful career. Oh, do not be alarmed," he added, as she seemed inclined to protest; "I do not resent it. Believe me, I cherish no illusions. I told you I should ask you one favour, and it is this. I am a proud man, and I am determined to take my dismissal from your lips, and yours only. I want you to say to me, 'Richard Vancom, I do not love you—I never can love you. If you were rich and famous to-morrow it would make no difference. You are to me what you are to my father and the rest of them, and it is nothing to me that you are going.'"

The girl hung her head in silence.

"Come, come," said Vancom almost roughly. "This is a small favour. If I have asked too much rhetoric from you, say simply, 'You are right—go.'"

Katharine dropped her sewing on her knees and covered her face with her hands. "I—I cannot say it," she murmured in a broken voice.

The surgeon looked at her for a moment in doubt. Then springing to his feet with an eager look he rested one hand on the table, and with the other drew his companion's hands away from her face. There were tears in her eyes which welled over under his regard.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried hoarsely. "Katharine, Katharine, how must I interpret this?"

The familiarity of his address brought the girl to herself. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she rose from her seat, and looked her companion in the face with the frank regard which was characteristic of her.

"Dr. Vancom," she said, "you have asked me whether I share the ill opinion which you say that others have expressed of you. I answer that, instead of this, I honour and trust you. I have not listened to your long talks with my father without seeing what it must have cost a man of your capacity to devote himself unrewarded to the pursuit of science; to sacrifice all his prospects in life for the sake of his studies, hoping perhaps one day to make other people happier by them. A woman can respect something beside worldly success. Oh, I understand you. Other people may not; I do and always have done!"

The surgeon bent his head. He was experiencing the worst humiliation a proud man can feel—to find himself admired for qualities he is conscious of possessing only in the good-natured self-deception of another. Richard Vancom was not a hypocrite

or a pretender. He had worked hard, it is true, but he was born a plodder, and he was poor because he lacked the brilliancy of other men. There had been no willing self-abnegation in his case. Suddenly, however, his mind was flooded with light. This estimate of him was from the heart, and not from the head—it was the woman's love that was speaking.

"But my duty," she added gravely, "is, you know, here in my mother's place."

The surgeon advanced towards her with outstretched hands, his face illumined by a look which no living being had ever seen upon it before.

"Do your duty," he said. "But tell me once more that you are not indifferent to me! Tell me that if one day I can claim you with your father's full assent, with your own obligations discharged, you will not repulse me. Tell me that I can leave this place knowing that there is one human being in the world who will wish for my return; one woman, the dearest and best of women, in whose eyes, unworthy as I am, I am not an outcast!"

For answer she placed her hand upon his shoulder and then let her head fall upon her hand.

Vancom stroked her brown hair with a caressing touch, and then turned to go. An extraordinary exaltation had taken possession of him, and he longed to be alone to think over all that had happened, to realize all that it meant to him. Even the very presence of the woman he loved seemed oppressive; he must get away into the fresh air and think, and think.

At this moment little Ernest came running into the room, crying bitterly and in a state of childish terror. He had been out into the street and a "bogey" had come up from the canal road, caught him, and cut him in the cheek.

"Silly boy," said Katharine, turning to console him, "to be so afraid of a cat. But what a nasty scratch!"

CHAPTER IV.

A DRIZZLING rain was still falling, and the high wind was howling dolefully around the street corners. But Richard Vancom had no thoughts for the weather. The sudden awakening of emotions which had laid dormant all his hard self-concentrated life, the strange expansion of his being which had been brought about by those few unlooked-for words of love and sympathy, had bewildered him. The very street seemed different; it had grown wider and more wholesome; the jerry-built houses on either side

had taken to themselves larger proportions. The chemist's shop itself might have been a Palace of Delight. Yesterday he had felt sure that fortune was within his grasp, but it had scarcely quickened his heart by a single beat. Now, no labour, no sacrifice seemed too hard to win it, and with it that newly seen future opening out into such immeasurable vistas of hope.

Truly the man had become a boy again, and the fact that he had known so little of the emotions and the hopes and the passions which are the daily bread of men who lead full lives had facilitated the transformation. He was beginning life, as they understand life. As yet, however, he could realize nothing, and the one impulse in him was to move, and move rapidly.

So for well nigh an hour he walked with the wind and against the wind, up and down the ill-paved streets and alleys of that dismal neighbourhood. Once or twice he met a foot passenger struggling with an umbrella in the teeth of the gale and swearing in broad Lancashire dialect at the inhospitality of the night. Even this seemed an unbearable irruption upon his thoughts, and finally he made his way to the banks of the canal, where, stumbling over mounds of ill-smelling rubbish and splashing through pools of rain-water, he could at least pace backward and forward unnoticed and undisturbed.

In time, however, fatigue began to tell upon him, and with weariness of the body came something like mental calm. He made his way back to the dismal house at the corner of Eden Street, laughing as he let himself in with his latch-key to think how soon he should sever himself from it and all its associations of poverty and humiliation. He climbed the stairs with the intention of entering his laboratory, but a sudden impulse came over him and he mounted to the top of the house. He wanted to speak to that half-brother whom a few hours ago he would joyfully have seen lying dead at his feet, to speak kindly, cheerfully, sympathetically, as he had never spoken before, to share with one human being the happiness which he felt it almost too much to bear alone.

He opened the door of the large attic where the idiot passed most of his time in childish occupations. It was empty. He made his way down again, looking in one room after another, and calling his half-brother by name. It was rare indeed that the imbecile left the house, for the rough children of the place made his life a burden with their jeers and grimaces when he did so. Suddenly Vancom stopped. A suspicion had taken possession of him which blanched his face and sent an icy shudder through his frame. Could Neddy have got access to the labora-

tory? Was he there now, and what might he be doing? He ascended the stairs again and tried the laboratory door. It was unlocked, although he knew that he had carefully fastened it before leaving the house.

He flung open the door expecting to find his half-brother in possession. The room was empty, but at a glance he saw that there was something wrong.

The gas-lamp on the desk was burning, and beside it, despoiled of its contents, lay the leather case which he had fastened so securely before going out. On the floor were scattered several tubes like the one he had been scrutinizing early in the evening; but a moment's search told him that that particular tube was gone.

The full horror of the situation dawned on Vancom's mind. Here was this imbecile at large carrying with him the seeds of a pestilence that might sweep like a devastating blast through the whole town, sparing neither high nor low, old nor young in its progress—that once brought into activity in the west might know no surcease—threatening death in a hideous form to generations yet unborn. And the moral responsibility was his own! Yesterday that was the last thing he would have thought about; now it was the first.

Only one thought possessed him—to track the idiot down and take the virus out of his possession before he could accomplish any mischief. For that he meant mischief Vancom had no doubt. He knew that there were times when his half-brother's lunacy took a shape which made him a very different being from the slobbering fool whom the boys pelted in the streets. The cunning which Neddy had displayed in getting possession of the poison would aid him when he came to turn it to account.

Without troubling further about anything else he rushed out into the street and began his quest. It was a cruel undertaking on that dismal night with that heavy load at his heart, and for a long time it was in vain. In the daytime or on an ordinary night Neddy Vancom could not have gone far without some one recognising his gigantic frame and shambling walk, but few people were abroad in the rain.

Once again, after he had searched for a time, Richard Vancom heard the story of a bogey who had sprung upon a child from a dark corner, had frightened her and wounded her, and afterwards he came across a man who had more precise information to give. He had seen "Crazy Neddy" stab a child in the neck with a "penknife," and had given him chase, but the idiot had fled and out-distanced him.

Weary of his fruitless search the surgeon returned homewards,

and was about to re-enter the house when he saw a figure crouching in the shadow under the window of the chemist's shop. An instinct told him that it was the idiot, and with a great effort at self-control he walked deliberately across the street.

"What are you doing there?" he said with a forced calmness, and in the authoritative way in which he was accustomed to address his charge.

The man rose to his feet in the full light of the shop window. He was hatless, his long fair hair, dishevelled by the wind, almost covered his eyes, which were frenzied and starting from their sockets. The rain had soaked his heavy beard. In one hand he held the missing lancet, the other was closed over something the nature of which the surgeon could easily guess.

"Oh, oh!" he said with a hoarse laugh; "I am waiting for your fine lady. I am in love with her, too, I am, and we are going to have *it* together. See—you give *it* to me, and I give it to her. That's fair, and you can bury us together. Keep back," he added savagely, raising the lancet as Vancom approached him, "or there will be three of us."

The surgeon had now regained all his old coolness.

"Put that thing down," he said in a voice of command.

The idiot hesitated and drew out into the road.

"Put it down!" repeated Vancom angrily. And raising the heavy cane which he carried with him he dealt his brother a swishing blow across the face.

In an instant the idiot's courage had vanished. Turning with a cry of brute terror like that which he had given when he was wounded with the lancet in the afternoon, he made at full speed down the road leading to the canal, dropping the lancet and the tube in his flight.

Vancom may not have noticed that he had abandoned these things—he could not be sure about it himself afterwards—but the spirit of the chase was on him, and he followed in hot pursuit. As they approached the narrow bridge which crossed the canal obliquely, Vancom was close upon his brother, and he raised his stick to deal him another heavy blow. The idiot saw the act and, swerving aside, ran with his bent head full tilt against the masonry of the bridge, and, staggering blindly forward, fell with a dull thud into the water.

The surgeon stood looking for a minute to see whether the body came to the surface, but the waters had closed quietly over it. It had perhaps been caught in the foul rubbish at the bottom. Then, having satisfied himself, Vancom walked slowly and meditatively back to the house in Eden Street.

The next day every one in the neighbourhood knew that Neddy Vancom, after running amuck among the children, and generally behaving as the escaped inmate of a madhouse might have been expected to do, had drowned himself. People thought it was on the whole a fortunate occurrence.

CHAPTER V.

RICHARD VANCOM did not go to bed that night. He had dragged an old horsehair sofa into his laboratory and on this he succeeded once or twice in gaining a few minutes' fitful slumber. But most of the night he worked with a haggard drawn expression on his face and a dreadful oppression at his heart.

The next day the body of Edward Vancom was brought home to await the inquest. The surgeon had it placed in his own bedroom next the laboratory, knowing that he himself would have no need of a bed until the time of suspense was over. Once or twice that night he thought as he sat at his desk he heard the door softly open and his half-brother glide into the room in his old timid, appealing fashion. But it was only fancy, of course—the outcome of an overstrung nervous system. There was a time when Richard Vancom boasted that he had no nerves.

“The period of incubation,” it is written in Vancom’s own record, “is four days. The duration of the disease from its onset is rarely more than forty-eight hours, when the patient dies from exhaustion.” So that for four days the surgeon had to wait and ponder and work as best he could before knowing whether his fears were to be realised. Perhaps the imbecile after all had failed of his purpose, and if not, was there not the antidote which only he among men knew about, which had cost him so many years of toil and study—the modified and attenuated virus which, following out the new lines of discovery, he had found capable of arresting the progress of the disease if introduced into the system when the symptoms first declared themselves? Yes, thank God, there was the antidote!

And yet at the bottom of his heart Richard Vancom was conscious of a doubt even as to his great discovery. Yesterday he had been all confidence. He had tested his remedy exhaustively enough upon the brutes whose tortured and fevered bodies had been the field of his experiments. But it had not yet stood the great final test of actual use in the human frame—a test which the Indian Government had promised to give him full opportunity

of making, and which, in a few days' time, if all had gone well, he would have started for the East to make. As often as the doubt arose he endeavoured to dismiss it, and when he was satisfied that his work was done, and that he was prepared for all emergencies, he tried hard to sleep. Now and then he would snatch an hour or so's fitful slumber couched beside his desk.

Four days had passed and no rumour had arisen of any exceptional sickness in the neighbourhood. Vancom began to breathe a little more freely. What proof was there after all that the dead man, whose burial had taken place that day—a relief to Vancom, for the body in the next room had been an uncanny neighbour during his state of nervous tension—had done more than inflict a scratch or two which by this time had healed up harmlessly? The temperate climate might in itself enormously diminish the danger of inoculation, for the disease was peculiarly one of tropical lands. In another twenty-four hours he would begin to feel safe, in another forty-eight he promised himself a night's sound sleep, and ere a week was over he would be a free man, on his way to London to make his preparations for an early departure.

Thus thinking, as he sat at his desk at midnight, he dozed off in his armchair. Probably he had slept a couple of hours—the longest spell of rest he had enjoyed since the period of suspense began—when he was aroused by a loud ringing at the bell. He awoke, a little dazed for the moment, but, recalling where he was and what had happened, he rose to his feet with a resolute gesture, as of a man who is face to face with some wild beast and knows there is nothing left but to do battle for life.

He never doubted for a moment what that ringing meant.

"It is come," he said, as he donned his hat and overcoat; and, locking the black leather case, he thrust it into his pocket.

At the door he found John Harrop, the chemist.

"Come across at once, Vancom," he said appealingly; "my boy Ernest is in a state of high fever. I cannot tell what ails him."

A week later the epidemic was at its height. For some reason—probably because the sanitary conditions in the better parts of the town were unfavourable to its spread—it kept within a certain confined area, but within these limits it raged with a cruel and deadly fury. The people of the district well remember the terror which it caused, the fierce rapidity with which it spread, and the perplexity of the local physicians in face of a disease which not merely failed to yield to treatment but baffled diagnosis. In a day or two it began to be openly

said that the only doctor who knew how to deal with it was the Eden Street surgeon who had been so little known in the neighbourhood, and so little trusted by those who did know him. People remember, too, how, with the approval and help of his professional brethren, night and day and in all weathers, Vancom went from house to house, taking no thought of sleep or food or drink until at times he would stagger like a drunken man from exhaustion and fatigue. And soon it became known that where he had administered his remedy or induced others to administer it in the early stages of the disease there had yet been no death. The fever had abated ; the more terrible symptoms had been arrested. The disease had ceased to spread, and the local doctors, sinking all professional jealousies and the natural suspicions which in those days this class of treatment engendered, were loud in their expressions of hope.

Vancom himself, when at last he found time to rest and think, began to see a glimmer of light before him. There had been deaths, many deaths ; but after all was he responsible ? It was no fault of his—at least it was not directly his fault—that Edward Vancom had acted as he did, and he had spared himself no labour, no suffering, no risk in his efforts to stem the tide of the disease. Might he not be destined to save thousands of lives for every one which had been sacrificed here ?—and why, when all his existence had been so hard, should he now shut the door of hope in his own face ?

At the same time he saw, what his professional colleagues did not see, that the time had not yet come to feel absolute confidence in his remedy. He had studied this strange disease as no one else had ever studied it, and he was not satisfied with the history even of the cases which were held to be most promising. It was evident that his remedy was effective in retarding the progress of the malady, that with repeated inoculations it had so far baffled the original virus, but that it had conquered the poison—that it was not even growing weaker in the battle against it—remained yet to be proved. So far there had been no single case of absolute recovery.

These haunting fears were justified. One morning when he began his usual round he came to a cottage where the blinds had just been drawn down. A boy who had been stricken, and who seemed to be improving under his care, had had a relapse, and had died in a terrible access of the symptoms which had been held at bay. A woman followed and a man—and he knew that his work had failed.

Then came the crowning blow of all.

He made no impotent effort to save *her*. He would not bring his discredited skill to prolong the torments which the merciful rapidity of the disease would so soon bring to an end. But he watched by her bedside, and when the time came at which the progress of the malady showed itself in its most repellent form, when the fair features of the woman he loved were melting into a formless mass, and the chemist himself drew back from his daughter's side in repugnance and fear, Vancom lifted the fevered head on his arm and pressed on the swollen lips his first and his last kiss in the one great emotion of his life.

There was no emotion in the aspect which the surgeon wore when a day or two later he followed the remains of Katharine Harrop to the grave. He had lost his fleeting popularity now, and people found something hard and even cruel in the lines of his white set face, something stony in the look which he fixed on the coffin after it had been lowered, and which he still bent to fix upon it even when the other mourners had drawn back. Then, without exchanging a word with any one, without looking to right or left, and wearing the same set aspect, he walked straight back to the desolate house in Eden Street, let himself in and locked the door behind him.

* * * * *

Six days later Harrop, the chemist, aided by a police-constable, forced his way into the house. On the floor of the laboratory Richard Vancom lay dead, with his right arm and head still resting on the low sofa beside the desk. He had probably fallen there in his death agony. On the desk carefully locked was the leather case which I have in my possession now, but which contained nothing that in these days is more than a commonplace of a bacteriologist's laboratory. In the middle was this pile of foolscap with its mass of small writing, carefully numbered and arranged; and beside it lay the lancet which, with more fatal effect than the fang of a poisonous snake, had made its mark on Vancom's fore-arm and his neck.

H.

In a Visible Form.

“And the last hour is shod with fire from Hell,—
This is the end of every man’s desire.”

CERTAINLY, it was by far the best thing that he had ever done.

He leaned back in his chair, having carefully wiped his pen after the word “Finis,” and looked at the pages as they lay before him. He had written and published several books, chiefly novels of the “domestic” order, but this was something quite different. There were none of the little mannerisms and sentimentalities that caused amusement even to his admirers. This story ran evenly and vigorously, in an easy natural style. The interest centred round a woman of what might be called “strong personality.” As he reclined in his chair, with his eyes closed, and thought of her, he felt as if she were no creation of his brain, but a real, living woman. It seemed for the moment as if she were near him, perhaps in the room.

He opened his eyes hastily and looked round. How absurd! Of course no one was there. He strolled to the window. Heavy rain—no use to go to his club. He would look for his wife, and see if a cup of tea would drive away this strange feeling of oppression.

How cosy and comfortable it was in the drawing-room, with his wife in her easy-chair, and two rosy children sitting at her feet on the rug! He had a foolish fancy that he, too, would have liked to sit there, and rest his head on her knee.

Afterwards, when the babies had gone to bed, he talked to his wife about the new book.

“It is quite my best work,” he said, “but, somehow, I feel as if I should like to put it in the fire.”

His wife raised her eyebrows.

“Why, in the world?”

“Well, it is not like my other novels. The woman is—yes—wicked, but she is very interesting.”

His wife paused.

"Everyone writes about wicked people nowadays," she said.

"And all the good people read about them," he said, with a bitter little laugh. (Some critic had noticed his last story among 'Gift Books for Young People.') "Well, I suppose I must stick to it, but I don't feel quite easy."

"There can be no harm, so far," said his wife, sagely. "You need not send it off if you don't like it, when you have quite finished with it. Half-past six! I must run! I promised to look after the school-library for an hour."

"Must you go?" He felt a curious reluctance to part with her.

"Of course; I promised. And you know you don't generally want me at this time."

"No," he admitted, grudgingly. If it were not too foolish, he would have liked to go with her. Anything rather than be left alone.

In a little while he went back to his study. He was conscious of giving a hurried glance round as he entered, but all was as he had left it. He sat down and turned over his MS. He might as well read it through and begin to polish it for the publisher.

Certainly, Ulrica was a wicked woman. Now that he came to examine what he had written, he began to wish that some passages had never existed. Should he alter them? But they were much the best—so racy, so smart; he hardly recognised his own work. He could not cut them out; he must bring the rest to the same level.

But it is not so easy for a good man to create a thoroughly wicked woman. He found that Ulrica sometimes relapsed into (comparative) virtue in a very unsatisfactory manner. What would she have done under such and such circumstances? He must think it out.

"I don't believe I shall do anything with the book, as it is now," he said to his wife, after dinner, when she had settled herself in the low chair before the fire, and taken up one of the white fleecy stockings, at which she was continually knitting in spare moments. "I shall have to write it all over again, from beginning to end."

"What a nuisance!" said his wife; "but perhaps it will be all the better for it."

She was used to her husband's anxieties over his work, and took them very placidly, being one of those calm, handsome matrons, whom clever, overworked men adore as being "restful," and clever, impatient women despise as being "cow-like."

Next morning, the author spread a clean sheet of paper on his writing-desk, and began resolutely at page 1, chapter the first. When previously writing the story, Ulrica had only been to him as one of the principal characters—more interesting, it is true, than the virtuous heroine, who was rewarded with a husband at the conclusion—but still, one figure amongst many. Now, the other characters seemed to fade into insignificance, and she alone remained distinct. The whole plot turned round her. He thought no more of art or of probabilities. He could only think of Ulrica. All scenes in which she bore no part were tame and uninteresting, and he hurried through them carelessly, as a piece of taskwork, in order that he might return to her.

It was clear to him that his style had undergone a wonderful improvement in the last few months. Never before had writing been such a pleasure to him; never before had he been able to write for three hours together without laying down his pen and casting about for an idea or a phrase. When the book was at last completed, he knew that it would give him a place among the first novelists of the day. Then again came the misgiving that he must not let it go before the world in this form. Some passages must be softened or suppressed. But to do this would be to spoil the whole. It was not the desire of fame that resolved him in the end to send the book to his publisher just as it was; it was the thought of Ulrica. So real had she become to him that it seemed like mutilating a living creature to make any change in his conception of her. She must go forth into the world as she had revealed herself to him.

So 'Man's Desire' came out, and, as will be remembered, it was the sensation of the season. Everyone read it—the wicked people, to amuse themselves, and the good people, to be able to caution others against it. Those few who sternly declined to let it lie on their tables did not lose much by their virtue, as it was discussed and quoted in every drawing-room. Young men, with two ideas in their heads, tried to talk in epigrams; young women with red arms wore black velvet gowns, and carried ostrich feather fans—all in imitation of Ulrica. It was said that some of these foolish people carried their imitation beyond such harmless limits. In short, 'Man's Desire' made the publisher's fortune and greatly improved the author's position. He was beset with requests to write for magazines and reviews, to receive interviewers, to send his photograph to the illustrated papers, and all the other little petitions which are despatched by every post to the man of the hour. He was famous, and yet, strange to say, he was not happy.

Although he threw himself heart and soul into whatever work he might have before him, yet, as his books were finished, one by one, he had always been able to dismiss all further thought of them—save from a business point of view—and interest himself in a new set of characters. But he could not dismiss Ulrica. Instead of working out the plot of the novel that was to appear in the *Mayfair Magazine*, in the autumn, he could only wonder what she would have done in the situation of the heroine. He dreamed of her by night and day, as a young man dreams of his love; her face was ever floating before him, and her low deep voice sounded continually in his ears.

One morning he suddenly resolved to put a stop to all this folly. He could not afford to waste more time. So he drew a chair to his desk, and began resolutely to sketch the outlines of the first few chapters.

But his pen had scarcely traced three words upon the paper, before it dropped from his hand, and he sank back in his chair, sick with incomprehensible fear. He knew well that it was only a fancy, but at the same time he felt that Ulrica was standing before him, resting her long slender fingers upon the table, and gazing at him with her dark grey eyes. He flung away pen and paper, and fled from the room, not daring to cast a look behind him.

"I think I must have a little holiday," he said to his wife in the evening. "I don't feel up to my work."

"Yes, I should say that it would be the best thing for you," she rejoined. "You don't look well."

"All right, then. I thought of going to Westward Ho for a little golf—but perhaps you would rather have a week at Pangbourne."

"I? Oh, my dear, I don't think I can manage to go with you."

The author's face fell.

"I don't care to go without you."

"Oh, nonsense! You will enjoy your golf much more if I am not in your way. You see, I don't like to leave home, just now. That examination at Muriel's school begins next week, and she is sure to get over-excited and eat no breakfast, unless I am here to look after her."

The author quite agreed that it was unadvisable to leave Muriel to her own devices, but suggested that she might give up the examination and come with her parents.

"Oh, no, Horace dear, it would make the child miserable. She has been working so hard this term, and they seem to think that she has a fair chance of winning the Latin prize."

So the author stayed at home, and made spasmodic attempts at work. Fancying that his wife's presence was some protection, he would coax her into the study on one trivial pretext or another, and try to make her sit with him while he wrote. But he dared not confess the truth to her, and she saw no reason for dawdling away the whole morning in the study, because her husband said that he felt lonely without her. It was not so very long since he had declared that he could not write if any one were in the same room with him.

Then he gave up all thoughts of writing until he should be able to take a holiday. Still he could not shake off the dull oppression or the haunting dread. The author of 'Man's Desire' naturally received many invitations that season. His wife liked parties, and he went with her, not because he liked it, but because he was afraid of being left alone. He would get into a corner behind the door, if possible, and stupidly wonder how he came to be there. How uninteresting, how lifeless, seemed all the women around him, by the side of the terrible living woman whom he had created ! Once, as this thought crossed his brain, he thought he saw her coming through the crowd towards him. Was she going to claim him for her own before them all ? He caught his wife by the arm, and told her that she must come home at once. For a few days he was so ill that she devoted herself to him, and kept the phantom at bay ; but when he began to recover, she was inclined to leave him to himself.

To do her justice, the grandest ball in London would not have drawn her from her husband's side if he had expressed a wish for her to stay with him. Yet surely she could not leave the various societies, of which she was so useful and influential a member, to manage their own business because he imagined that he could not sit in the house without her ? So she went off to her committees and conferences, thinking that it was for the poor dear fellow's good not to encourage his morbid ideas ; and he felt the horror creeping nearer, day by day.

It was a chilly, rainy evening on which he crawled home after a long expedition into the city. As he dragged himself along the street, he gathered comfort from the thought that his wife would be sitting by the fire, waiting for him. She would give him his tea, and they would talk comfortably together, and perhaps, after a little rest, he might feel equal to playing with baby. A soothed look was already passing over the worn face as he opened the drawing-room door.

The room was empty ; the fire was low ; there was no sign of his wife.

He dropped into an armchair, and sat there, motionless. It never occurred to him to ring the bell for coals, or for a cup of tea. He only knew that he was wearied and chilled to death, and that his wife, the only person who could have put new life into him, was not there.

Hush! what was that? Only the rustle of a feather fan, waved gently to and fro by long slender fingers. The fingers rested against a black velvet dress. His eyes travelled slowly upwards. There was a bunch of red geraniums in front of the low bodice—there was a pearl necklace round the thin neck.

Yes, it was Ulrica, standing with one arm on the mantelpiece, as he had described her in the great scene of 'Man's Desire.' Ulrica, with her gleaming eyes, and her loose fair hair knotted at the back of her neck. For one moment she gazed on him, while a triumphant smile curled her thin pale lips; then softly—very softly—she stepped to his side, and bent over him. The touch of those lips on his mouth scorched him like a flame—he strove in vain to break from her—and then. . . .

* * * * *

"There is really no need to distress yourself, my dear madam," said the doctor; "the last struggle often leaves such an expression of suffering. We have no reason to imagine that your poor husband's death was in any way—er—troubled."



The Dead Man's Hand.

KELSALL was a brilliant short story writer and a novelist with a future. Although he made a good income from his pen he had some relatives on his hands; so he kept less than half his earnings for himself and lived in second-rate lodgings, sharing his sitting-room with another man—Tolson West.

West was a journalist; a man of considerable learning and ability; on artistic matters an authority; but he was by nature unobtrusive and retiring, and to us on the *Pioneer*, apart from his excellent work, he was chiefly noteworthy for his undisguised admiration for Kelsall and his tales. It was a pleasure to see a man so appreciative of another. They lived together some four years, and then Kelsall was struck down with fever. He took a chill when he was recovering, and died; and there was no one who knew the man personally or through his writings but was sorry.

It was a terrible blow to West. He had nursed Kelsall with more than a woman's care all through his illness, and he was nearly heart-broken when he died. Some of us tried to cheer him; but our visits were not welcomed, and never repeated. And so he lived a lone and solitary man, nursing his grief—and drinking.

Then a most singular thing happened. West, who went in for solid truth, or what he took for it, and whom we did not think capable of writing a line of fiction to save his life, suddenly came out as a story writer, and in a very short time bid fair to equal Kelsall in reputation. And he didn't seem a bit proud of it, but was more annoyed than anything else when it was referred to; as a matter of fact, he published his tales under a pseudonym. This did not ensure secrecy; and a month after his first story appeared we of the *Pioneer* knew that "Caleb Hardcastle" and Tolson West were one and the same man.

Before long West threw up his journalistic work and confined himself to his tales.

They were just the antithesis of Kelsall's bright writings ; and yet there were those, who knew of the relationship of the two men, who said they detected Kelsall's influence in them, and even his humour, though most gruesomely metamorphosed. Some indeed went so far as to say that West was palming off Kelsall's unpublished work as his own : in no other way could they account for his outburst as a writer.

All the while, West, instead of being elated by his sudden good fortune, seemed to grow more depressed and reserved, till at last he became absolutely misanthropic. He would shut himself up in his sitting-room for days at a time. His meals were left outside his door ; he slept in the room ; nothing was seen of him, and nothing heard but the interminable "click" of his typewriter.

But his tales ! They fairly carried you away with them. Never since Swift was there such caustic wit and biting satire ; never since Poe such abandonment to the grotesque and the terrible. His plots were daring to temerity, and before long it was rumoured that on this account some of the magazines were refusing them.

I was sitting in my room one night when a note was brought to me :—

"For God's sake come.—T. WEST."

I was somewhat surprised ; as much to receive the note itself as at its emotional wording, for I scarcely reckoned myself among his friends—indeed, I did not know he had any.

Fearing he had met with an accident I put on my hat at once and made straight for his rooms. His landlady met me at the door.

"I was to take you up directly you came, sir," she said ; and then confidentially, "and I'm more than glad Mr. West has sent for you. I don't know what's come over him of late."

"Is he ill then ?"

"No, sir ; leastways not as I knows of, but I haven't seen him for a week. He hasn't been out of his room since last Thursday."

By this time we had reached West's door. Mrs. Harper knocked and called out :

"Mr. Bethell, sir."

The door was flung open, and West stood on the threshold. He almost dragged me in, and then slammed the door in his landlady's face. He looked at me for a moment in a nervous, hesitating way, then sat down, buried his face in his hands and burst into tears.

"Come, come, man," I said, "what the dickens is up ? You're

got a beastly fit of the blues anyway. You've been overworking yourself."

He made no reply; so to give him time to recover himself I walked round the room, noting details as I did so. The place was dirty and untidy to the last degree, and it had evidently served as a living and sleeping-room for some time. Unwashed plates and cups were scattered among books and papers, empty spirit bottles were thrown about on the floor, and a half-filled one stood on the table with a tumbler beside it. By it was the type-writer with a blank sheet of paper in it, and all around were innumerable sheets of type-written copy. On the sofa were pillows, rugs and blankets; and the fireplace was chaotic with cinders.

West had somewhat recovered by this time and came towards me. He was terribly changed. Never robust at his best, he now looked like a broken-down old man. All life seemed to have left his drawn and bloodless face; his eyes glittered with an unnatural light; his hair was streaked with grey. His clothes were dirty and dishevelled; and I doubted if he had washed for a week.

"Bethell," he said as he came up to me, "I'm glad you've come. I don't think I could have stood it a day longer."

"Stood what, old chap? Your room? I don't think I could either. Why don't you open the windows and have the place cleaned? You ought to go out for some fresh air."

He looked at me in a piteous way.

"I can't, Bethell; I can't. Would to heaven I could!"

"Nonsense, man," I said in as cheery a tone as I could assume; "come out with me. You can tell me all about it then;" and I made as if for the door.

"Don't leave me, Bethell," he cried, clutching me by the arm. "Don't leave me, for pity's sake. I can't go out. Sit down with me here."

Seeing it was useless to do anything but humour him, I did as he asked me. He seated himself opposite on the sofa, and when he spoke he toyed aimlessly with the rugs and blankets.

"Now, West," I said, "tell me all about it. No humbug, you know."

He glanced fearfully around.

"Do you think we are alone?" he asked.

"I'd stake my last dollar on it," I replied.

West leaned forward.

"You're wrong," he whispered hoarsely. "Kelsall's here."

I don't know whether it was the gruesomeness of the thought

or the man's way of saying it that affected me, but I felt a cold shiver run down my back.

"Nonsense, West," I said, after a moment's pause; "you mustn't get ideas like that into your head. You ought not to have kept this room on; you brood too much."

He got up from the sofa and stood over me with the unearthly light in his eyes.

"I tell you, Bethell, Kelsall's here. Don't contradict me," he said fiercely. Then he resumed his seat.

I saw it was no good irritating him, so went on:

"Well, I'll take your word for it, West. But why should you be unhappy, if it is so? You liked Kelsall better than any other man."

He sat there, fingering the rugs. His face twitched spasmodically, and he stared at the wall behind me. At last he spoke:

"I'll tell you, Bethell. I think I should go mad if I kept it to myself any longer. You never looked upon me as a likely believer in ghosts, did you?"

"No. You always seemed matter of fact enough."

West laughed harshly.

"So I was, till Kelsall died. Do you know, man, I loved him. I would have died for him when he was living; now I hate the very thought of him, but I am literally dying for him to-day. Curse him!"

He hissed out the last words, and then sat glowering at the dead fire, seemingly unconscious of my presence.

"Go on, West," I said at length; "I'm waiting."

He looked up dazedly, then passed his hand over his forehead as if to gather his thoughts.

"You were speaking of Kelsall," I said.

"Yes, yes; I remember. He died in this room, on this very sofa, and I alone was with him. In his last days, when he knew he was going, we discussed the future, and I begged him to come back to me from the grave. He promised; and he made me swear by all I held sacred that when he came I would do his bidding. I swore; and he has come."

Again he glanced furtively round the room.

"You have seen him then, and spoken to him?" I asked.

"No. I have neither seen him nor spoken to him."

"Then how in the name of fortune do you know he is here?"

West sprang up.

"Know he is here, man," pointing to the litter of copy on the table. "Know he is here? There's evidence for you. Do you

see that pile of typed stuff? Every word of it was written to-day by Kelsall."

He was mad—stark mad; I could not doubt it. Yet possibly I might do something to restore his reason.

"How do you make that out, West," I said as calmly as I could, "if you have never seen him?"

He was now quite composed, and resumed his old seat.

"It was about a month after Kelsall's death," he went on, "that I first knew it. I was working at the typewriter which he had left to me, making out my first notice of the Academy for the *Pioneer*. Feeling thirsty, I got up for a drink. I walked across to the sideboard there, and while I was standing by it, 'click,' 'click' went the typewriter. I turned round amazed, and there were the letters dotting down one after the other, just as though some one were working it. I tell you I was scared, and I stood there with my eyes like to burst their sockets. On it went, line by line, and then suddenly stopped. It was some time before I had courage to go near it, but when I did and looked at what had been written, I was stunned. I just went to the window and opened it; for following on my report was the beginning of a tale written by that typewriter, a tale the like of which no one living could have written. You know it; it was 'The Dead Man's Hand.'"

I knew it well. It was the one that had started West on his career.

"When I had in a measure recovered, I took out the sheet and read it, and was wondering what on earth, or under it, it all meant when a few impatient 'clicks' of the machine made me look up. It was instinct, I suppose, or was it some uncontrollable impulse that made me insert another sheet? I did so; on went the typewriter, guided by a master hand, and the next folio of that tale was typed. By that time I had grown used to the situation, and as fast as the sheets were finished I inserted others, and within the hour I held in my hands the manuscript of the best short story that was ever written. When it was finished the machine refused to write more; and I spent the remainder of the evening and all that night in marvelling over the strange occurrence.

"I will admit that when I had got over my first fear of the supernatural element in it my feelings were of unbounded satisfaction. That it was Kelsall's tale I was firmly convinced, for he had promised to communicate with me, and this, I gathered, was his only means of doing so. Likely enough he would again show his presence in the same way; and it seemed he intended

doing me a good turn by providing me with literary matter which would enable me to earn money and renown. On the other hand, did he intend me to use this for publication; and if so, was I justified in attaching my own name to it?

"After much thought I sent it to Cunliffe, with whom I had been in correspondence for Kelsall when he was ill. He liked it, and asked for more of my work, which I was able to send; for during that fortnight another tale had been written by the typewriter, and one quite as strong as the former.

"Here was a stroke of unexampled good luck; and after I had convinced myself that it was likely to continue, I threw up my *Pioneer* work and devoted myself entirely to the typewriter. But before long I was conscious there was a terrible obligation attached to Kelsall's bequest. I could not leave the machine when it was writing or about to write. Some invisible influence constrained me to stand by it; whenever I essayed to leave the room or lie down to rest I was held back by an unseen, all-compelling power, and it was slowly forced upon me that I was Kelsall's slave.

"About a month after I left the *Pioneer*, I became conscious of an added horror. Kelsall's presence gradually made itself felt. Before then I was able to move freely by the typewriter, even when it was working, and could use it at other times if I wished; but slowly an icy-cold horror has crept into that chair; and there it sits. I know it is there though I can see nothing. Bethell, I tell you it is a living hell for me to feel that shadow from the grave, and never to be able to leave its side when it wills. It is there now."

I did not believe him, for I felt convinced he was suffering from a terrible monomania: so I went to the chair, determined to show him how groundless were his fears; yet his words had made such an impression upon me that I approached it with a certain amount of hesitation. I sat down in it: there was nothing.

"There, West," I said, "it's all pure imagination on your part. Come and try it yourself."

"No, no!" he almost shrieked. "I tell you he is there. He's there to me if to no one else. I would not sit in that coffin-chair for heaven itself. Kelsall's in it."

I shrugged my shoulders and resumed my former seat.

"Yes, Bethell," West went on. "Kelsall sits there and writes, and with an ever-increasing demand upon me—and what he now writes isn't fit for print. Read that."

He grabbed hold of a handful of copy and gave it me.

I read a page, and that was enough. It simply made my flesh creep. It might have been written by a soul in purgatory, for of all the fiendish horrors the brain of man ever conceived this was surely the most terrible. To think such things was awful; but to read them, impossible. I let the paper fall from my hands in sheer terror.

"And I have to stand by for days at a time and see that, and worse than that," continued West. "It's beyond human endurance. Yet if I try to escape this invisible power holds me back. Good God! what shall I do?"

I must say I felt for the man. Incredible as it may seem, I was beginning to believe in his story, for the evidence he had just shown me seemed insurmountable. Could any living being have written what I had just read? They were indeed the thoughts of one from the nether world; and every word West had spoken seemed to come from his very heart. Yet how could I help him in his terrible position?

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"I don't know, Bethell," he said wearily; "but it has eased my mind to tell you all. Surely you, with your cool head, can devise something. Think it over. Yet stay; I was forgetting. It did occur to me that if you came in when the typewriter was working, your presence might counteract Kelsall's influence. At any rate, you might try. Come in to-morrow morning and drag me out by main force, and break this infernal spell. Will you?"

"Certainly I will, West. But why not now?"

"I cannot. I haven't the strength for the struggle. I'm dead beat. I haven't slept two hours at a stretch for a week. I feel better now though after this talk with you, and I think I could sleep."

"Right you are, West. I'll come as soon as I can to-morrow. I would not leave you now; but for the office work; but I'll not go till you've had a good square meal. You'll let me ring for Mrs. Harper, won't you?"

West nodded listlessly.

His landlady came in reply to the bell; and in a quarter of an hour West was sitting down before a substantial meal. But he wouldn't eat. He took a few mouthfuls, and then pushed the tray away impatiently; and nothing I could say would induce him to have more. He drank off some brandy, and then threw himself on the sofa. I saw a good fire made, arranged his pillows and wraps, and then left him, reluctantly enough.

It was two o'clock before I left the *Pioneer* office. I was more

than half inclined to return to Mrs. Harper's, but hesitated to disturb the house, and possibly West, at that time of night. So I went back to my rooms and tried to get a few hours' rest. But I could not sleep, for my mind was busy with West.

Now that I was away from his personal influence, the utter improbability of his story forced itself upon me. Yet could I say it was impossible? The appearance of a friend in spirit form after death was firmly believed in by many. But even if Kelsall could have visited West, would he have troubled and tortured his friend in this way? He was the kindest of men when living, and I knew he was attached to West, and much appreciated his devotion. And could he possibly have written the horrors I had read? And yet if he had not written them, who had? Could West have done it? Impossible. After all, what I had learnt only confirmed what some believed—that the tales really were Kelsall's. If it were so, what could be done? The mere forcing West from the room would not break the spell. Kelsall would follow him—and what then? How would it all end? West would go mad under the strain—if he were not so already.

With my brain full of these conflicting and distressing thoughts, I at last dozed away. I dreamt I was in West's room. There was no one there but myself—myself and the typewriter. As I looked at it, the keys were pressed down by an invisible hand, and the letters struck the paper. I was drawn towards it by the unknown force that had mastered West. I tried to hold back; but it drew me like a magnet, and as I came near the machine I knew Kelsall was there. I could feel his presence, cold, cold, in death; and the invisible fingers moved, and the letters clattered down. I looked over and read what they were writing; and as I read, my very heart seemed to stand still, and I shrieked aloud. But I could not move away. There I had to stand, just as West had done, by that icy horror, and read what mortal man had never read before. Then I could bear it no longer; I was going mad! With a terrible cry I burst from that fiendish room—and awoke; and found myself standing by my bedside, trembling in every limb, with sweat upon my face.

I went into my sitting-room and stirred up the dying fire, made myself a stiff glass of hot spirit, and then turned into bed again. This time I soon fell asleep, and though vague thoughts of West and Kelsall flitted across my brain, I slept long after my usual hour.

It was eleven o'clock when I reached Mrs. Harper's.

"Well, how is Mr. West this morning? Did he have a good night?" I inquired.

Mrs. Harper shook her head.

" 'Deed, sir, I don't know how he is. His breakfast has been standing outside his door since eight o'clock, and he won't come for it; and it's little enough he slept, I'm sure. Likely he had an hour or two after you went; but he was at it again soon after I went to bed, and I don't think that horrid typer of his stopped once before daybreak. I'm used to it now, and it doesn't worrit me; but I could hear it in my sleep, and on it went 'clickety-clack' the whole blessed night."

I went upstairs and knocked at the door.

"West," I called out. "West, let me in. It's I—Bethell."

There was no reply. I repeated this, and hammered loudly; still without response. I burst open the door and entered. The room was in semi-darkness—the blinds down and the curtains drawn. The candles on the table had burnt out, and the grate was full of dead ashes. And West—he was sitting at the table in the very chair he said he dared not use, bowed over the typewriter, his fingers still on the keys!

"Wake up, old man," I said, touching him gently.

He did not move. I put my fingers on his hand; it was stone cold. He was dead.

A letter of the machine still touched the paper. I looked at what he had been writing. Great heavens! it was a continuation of the horrors he had shown me the night before!

HENRY A. HERING.

Cheating the Devil.

A MAN sat in his room at midnight. On the table lay an unfinished manuscript, with the ink still glistening upon it, and as he read it he glared savagely, and cursed.

"No good, no good," he muttered in bitterness of heart; "but why can I see—why do I know it? Why haven't I blind vanity enough to think myself a genius, and after the thing's fiftieth return from the d——d publishers, stick it in a drawer, and wait in peace until I could print it myself? But this is dust and ashes, every word of it. I want to write—by heaven, I do want to write and get to the front. I can't live without it. And this cursed thing grins at me, with its pinchbeck sentiment and weird humour. To the deuce with it!"

He threw it at the fire, and it was caught neatly by an old gentleman, who was sitting thereon, warming himself.

"You might have sent a stamped envelope for return," said he.

The man stared.

"How did you get there? Chimney, I suppose. You're no use here,—I haven't a sixpence. You might have a chance at 63, opposite: the fellow doesn't bank and makes a pile at cards: yes, go there. Why, man, look at your trousers,—they're red with heat."

"Nothing—nothing," replied the old gentleman, shivering slightly. "I'm rather cold if anything. All use, ain't it?"

"I—suppose—so. Rum use, yours, though. Where does it grow, may I ask?"

"I come from a place call Tophet, which means——"

"Oh!—hell," said the man.

"Fie! On a Sunday, too."

"Who are you?"

"The devil—Elderly Henry—the original Nicholas. My card, sir."

The man took the card and read :

*Satan the First,
Purveyor of Iniquity to the Universe.
Agents everywhere.*

A large supply of the latest political promises in stock :
reduction for a quantity.

“Go away,” said the man, “I’m sleepy.”

“Don’t you believe me?”

“Bah! It’s an age of shams. You don’t look a bit like the devil.”

The old gentleman got off the fire, and standing on the hearth-rug, stretched forth both hands into the fiercest flame.

The man laughed contemptuously.

“Cubino, the Fire King, does that every night at the Vermilion.”

The old gentleman drew from behind the last half of a tail, which he waved in the air.

“Why, we all had those things once. You’re awfully behind : really, you’re little better than a monkey. Come now, what can you do if you’re the devil?”

“I can do a cynical epigram, float a company, write a comic song, and make a fortune by manufacturing nothing, advertising it, and telling interviewers of my early struggles. I can——”

“Enough,” interposed the man, hastily ; “any one of those would do. I apologise.”

“Well, now,” said Henry, “what about this little affair?”

“What little affair?”

“Your future.”

“D—n my future.”

“Your future ’ll damn you if you don’t let me help you. It ’ll damn you if you do, too,” he added in soft soliloquy.

“What’s my future got to do with you?”

“You sent for me.”

“Bah! You’ve mistaken the number.”

“An end to this. I’m due at a meeting of mine company directors in Sydney in eleven minutes : after that, I’ve an appointment with a bishop on a matter of ritual : and there’s that clerk in New York whom I advised to recoup from the safe for twenty years’ small salaries,—he’s been dreaming in the night and gazing at his wife’s face,—I must send her somewhere and bring the tradesmen on him with accounts However, you want to write well,—money—fame. Command me.”

The man started up, his nerves at tension.

"Money! Fame!"

He paced about, repeating the words.

"Publishers, critics, public, all yours in the blink of an eye."

"Yes, yes, I know. I want it, oh God, how I want it!"

Nicholas glared.

"Don't mention names. Come, now, am I to do this little job for you, or are you going elsewhere? I have an extensive variety of famous futures vacant, in poetry and fiction. The humour department has been overhauled, and is now stocked with what I may call the humour of the future."

"That's no use. I want jokes that are seen now, not when I'm dead. But, what about—about—"

"Oh, usual terms. Pleasure of your company afterwards. Decide quick. I like you, you'd do me credit, but in two minutes the chance of your life will be gone."

"It's a bargain," said the man, extending his hand.

Nicholas shook it warmly.

"I thought you'd come round. Now, that's what I call—"

"Here, chuck that," said the future genius. "What I want to know is," he went on anxiously, "why don't you do a mocking peal of laughter? Where are your cloven feet? Why don't we sign a contract in blood, and drink a goblet of fiery wine together? I feel uneasy; it seems a loose way of doing business. Will the agreement hold good?"

"It's these actors,—they've used up all my old effects. Ah! the dear old days, when I had only to perform my world-renowned sardonic grin to send terror through a house, only to send one blue flame from my forehead to paralyse the strongest. I've taken lately to this old frock coat, but it's so hard to convince people. Good-night."

"Good-night. The matter's settled, then?"

As from the Pacific blue came faint and clear—

"As you keep faith, so will I."

The firegrate was empty.

The man, with closed eyes, peered into a future that seemed more real than the present.

"Thank heav—the devil!"

* * * * *

"Life, my dear young lady," said he, a couple of years later, "is a beautiful stream flowing over a bed of mud. A few swim smoothly, turning away with a gentle shudder from a glimpse of the depths, to quaff the sweet draught with their fellows: the rest—nearly all that have lived—are plunged beneath to choke and taste the dregs, and fight for every inch towards the top."

"It is very sad, and—well, you must know, I suppose; you are so clever. But don't you think—ah, one likes to think—that there are noble faces down there and brave lives?"

"If what one likes to think were to happen, the earth would become paradise again, and we poor authors would have to starve or take to gardening. Truth is ugly, and it is hard to be heroic on a small salary."

"You have written that, but I am sure you have more faith than your books."

"My books contain just as much faith as the public will pay for."

"Ah, I know you don't mean that. I can speak of goodness among the poor, for I have seen it."

"Reflected from the spectator."

"Hush," said she, averting a blushing face.

It was a plain face,—a face that was called homely by many who used in reproach the grandest word the language contains for woman. Its true expression was visible only to the seeing eye and came not through ancestry or environment, but from a life of thought and doing for others. She was of good family, and as she found herself unable to conform to the society method of producing the least results from the greatest opportunities, she went forth to ease the burdens of the sorrowful. Hers was a lonely life, for she worked as an individual, and not as a delegate from a society angling for souls. She made many friends, who, although willing to contribute their approval, and remark with cheerful imbecility that she was "so awfully devoted to the poor, you know," were not disposed to accompany her further than half-a-sovereign, which, as a believer in personal benevolence, she would not take.

Our author had met her as he was seeking material in the squalid parts of the city. He had been enabled to offer her a slight service, and acquaintanceship had developed into free communion on both sides, and warmth of feeling on one.

Admiration for his talents, intensified by the distinction of his profession, coalesced with the isolation of her position to make him a welcome figure. In the pleasure of her liking for him, she did not reflect upon what his absence might mean to her. It did not occur to her that the affinity of their relationship, as educated people electing their daily course amid unlovely poverty and ignorance, was slight and accidental, and that the divergence of their outlook upon the scene itself was inevitable and absolute,—his being that of an artist whose aims were selfish and who found satisfaction in the greatest misery,—hers, of a humanist who felt the pains of others as her own.

To him she was merely a part of the scene—the necessary plain-faced lady who cultivated charity instead of complexion—and he put her in his note-book. His manner towards her was in turn deferential, colloquial, and tender, and calculated to unfold her nature to him for his own purpose, and without regard for any lurking emotion he might be strengthening in her.

And so it came to pass that one day she looked and he was not, and again and again and still he did not come, and as she listened to the women's oft-told stories of the futility of life in that quarter, she could not help it that her tears were not all for them.

* * * * *

It was early morning, and as the man sat at work he felt well pleased. He had been to the Authors' Dinner, and had found the praise of experts very sweet.

“Nice, wasn’t it?” said a voice.

He looked at the fire where Nicholas sat—tailor-wise—in the middle.

“Look here, I want to work. Call again.”

Nicholas whistled meditatively.

“That’s the worst of letting you dine with authors; you won’t know me in the street directly. But you did blaze out, my boy; didn’t think it was in you.”

“Were you there?”

“Wasn’t I? Bless you, it was quite a reunion. I’ve done business with several that wouldn’t have been there if I hadn’t.”

“It’s no use,” said the man, flinging down his pen, “I can’t write while you’re chattering. What do you want?”

“I want you to marry.”

“Want away. I don’t want to marry. Perhaps you’ve chosen the girl.”

“I don’t do things by halves.”

“Is she pretty, plain, lean, fat, pale, smoked or a new woman?”

“Expression, interesting: figure, not very obvious; features assorted, but plenty of money. It’s your lady of the courts—and alleys.”

“What’s your game now?”

“I want her—she baffles me—my blood’s up. I persuaded her father to ask her to marry a man with a past, who would have made her life a you know what on earth, and driven her to some other fellow, but she wouldn’t listen. I induced a dowager-countess to introduce her to her nephew—a handsome young devil who can almost teach me—hoping that, under his influence, she might be helped a little my way, but she never got under it. To

tire her of slum work I set two men to attack and rob her, but they ran away when they recognized her."

"And so I'm to be the next missionary from the heathen."

"Yes. When you marry her you can use up all your own original sin, and I'll keep you supplied. Man, I'd rather win her than fifty ready mades."

"But I don't want to marry her. Besides, it would be a failure."

"She loves you; she would be yours, body and soul—and mine."

"If I marry I'll want beauty for my brains. She doesn't even dress well."

"Well enough for a plain woman and for the society she moves in."

"No woman is too beautiful or too plain to despise the assistance of dress."

"Come now, marry the girl."

"No, no, no. Marry her yourself. Run away and let me work."

"Have you any gratitude? What would you have been without me?"

"I'll keep the compact."

"Do you think that was all? You'd have been mine at the end if I'd never given you sixpence. There are struggling writers in England who'd have married twenty plain district visitors for half your fame. It's you she loves, though, and it's her I want. For the last time, will you marry her?"

"I'll keep the compact: that's reasonable enough."

"You'll be sorry, my boy. You are not the first who has tried to cheat the devil, and you won't be the first to do it."

* * * * *

Many years after the man lay dying. He had neither wife nor child nor mother to soothe his pillow, and yet he felt no ache for the present nor fear for the future. The life that lay behind him filled him with as great satisfaction in the retrospect as it had done in the prospect. All the cravings of his youth had been for literary fame, and now he had no unsated longing to haunt his death hour. His conscience was too vitiated and his self-criticism too obsequious to remind him that all his talent was but a gift.

And so he died.....

When the death stupor had left him and he recovered his sense of being, he looked around, and lo! he was on a great desert that was like nothing on earth for dreariness. He felt lonely, and as he stood musing one passed him, and he bethought him of his compact, and followed after and said—

"Can you show me the road to hell?"

Then he saw it was a woman, and raised his hand to bavo his head, for he did not realize as yet that he was a spirit.

"I am going there: you may come: it is very strange," said the woman.

As they journeyed they passed others, and the man looked behind and saw a long line of figures all going the same way, and he marvelled and said—

"Can there have been a plague on the earth?"

"I am told it is ever the same," said the woman.

The procession stopped, and the man looked and there was a great door, the top of which he could not see; and the door was flung open and the people went in. And when his turn came he felt a throb of joy to be at the end of that void waste, and at the entrance to a kingdom the ruler of which he knew so well.

Thus he was entering right gladly, when a tall majestic form stepped out and stood with arms outstretched across the doorway. The man looked up, and the face was his who had given him renown. He ran forward to the embrace of the open arms, but a flame shot forth and scorched him and the arms were still wide.

"Ah!" he cried, "'tis I."

"You cannot enter," came the answer.

"I come to keep the compact."

The man had not known fear since his birth till the devil bent his face and hissed—

"You broke it: now I break it. I've lost that girl through you. She's gone, do you hear?—gone to the other place. She died for you—loved you—broke her heart. Now go and die for yourself, if you can."

And he cast him forth into outer darkness, to wander to and fro, beating the air with his cries, and knowing only one thing: that to be alone is hell indeed.

WILLIAM JAMES.

The House.

THE chemist's wife lay back in her chair with a weariness not only of the body, but of the spirit also. Her pale, gold hair fell away from brows that, as she slept, lost for a while the strained, contracted look they wore habitually. She had been married only two years, and already found the ashes of life taste bitter in her mouth. In her sleep now she smiled, dreaming of those first happy days after her marriage. Her husband had been lecturer on chemistry at one of the larger colleges. His pay was good, and he had some money of his own. For six months they lived in perfect happiness together. Then one day he had come home excited and flushed, crying that he had made a great discovery. At first she had believed in it, sharing his eagerness, and agreeing cheerfully when he declared that he must throw up his appointment and devote his life to perfecting this marvellous discovery. The necessary instruments and materials were very expensive, and, without the regular salary his college work had given him, they had found it increasingly hard to afford them. One by one the much-treasured wedding-presents went to provide not only chemicals but even food.

The chemist's wife changed even as her home did. Always slender, she was now painfully thin, and continual fretting made ugly lines on her white forehead. That her husband still loved her she fully believed; but she was no longer first with him. His discovery had taken that place. She herself had no longer the joy of love. The sickness of hope deferred had given place to doubt. She felt that his life was given up to a chimera, and bitterly resented it. Yet still she cared for his comfort, going without herself that he might eat, though constantly wounded that he did not notice the sacrifice. As to-night, she always sat up for him, knowing that he would probably, in his absorption, take no rest were it not that he must come to let her go. She had stolen down to the laboratory door once or

twice and listened. A faint hissing sound was all she could hear. Once she had opened the door and looked in, but an impatient hand had waved her away.

A coal fell from the grate. The woman in the chair stirred uneasily, and, waking, gazed wistfully at the clock. One. The room was nearly dark. The lamp, from motives of economy, had long been put out. But before she slept the room had been brightly lit by the fire; now the cheerful blaze had given place to a dull red glow. She felt cramped and cold and strove to wake the fire to flame again. Her efforts were useless, and there was no more coal. She sat up gazing into the blackening grate, and thought sullenly that the fire was like her life, the happy light gone for ever, only a dull glow now, and blackness to come. Her husband would never complete his discovery, and soon they must move from this house and seek a cheaper dwelling. Her people had never been the same to her since her husband had given up his appointment.

“How could you let him do it?” they had said.

“How could I prevent it?” she asked the darkness. “They don’t know how strong this thing is that has killed my life.”

Once she had wished for a child. Now with bitterness she gave thanks that she had none.

“It would be another mouth to feed,” she said.

Downstairs the laboratory was brilliantly lighted. The chemist sat at the table resting his head on his hands. He had done all he could—brought every resource to bear, and to-night held success or failure. Before him was a large glass globe filled with a sort of thin, white jelly. Clear and colourless as water, it was not until the globe was shaken that the fact of its not being liquid could be seen. At the bottom was a lump of bluish, crystalline substance that was slowly dissolving. A thin chain of bubbles streamed upwards as it slowly melted, and the jelly became thinner and thinner. When the crystal had quite dissolved and the jelly was liquid, the chemist hoped to have before him the secret of the ages—the Elixir of Life. Would the crystal dissolve entirely? That was the question. At first it sank hissing in the yielding jelly. Now the rate of diminution seemed to be decreasing.

He could do nothing but wait. He thought of his wife upstairs, and wished wearily that she would go to bed. He would have gone up and entreated her to go, but he knew that it would be of no use. The critical moment was too near for him to leave the result till to-morrow.

"After all," he thought, "to-morrow eternal youth will be ours; fame and fortune will kneel to us. What is an hour's waiting to-night?" The veins on his temples stood out with excitement as he strove to school himself to patience. His eye fell on a dead mouse that lay awaiting experiment. His Elixir was not only to prolong life, but, if used before decay set in, to restore it. The mouse little knew, he thought, of what glorious fate awaited it when it beat itself against the bars of the trap yesterday. The image turned his thoughts.

His wife had used those words.

"I am like that mouse," she had said. "You say that it shall live again. How do you know? It isn't *that* it wants. Let it go free now—see how it beats itself against the bars."

"Patience," he had answered—"the end is very near." And she bitterly, over her shoulder—

"The end for us is starvation!" Poor little wife—she had been sorely tried of late. To-morrow all this weary waiting would be over, and they would begin life again.

"O God," he said aloud, "let me succeed! Let me succeed!"

If he failed? Well, he would give up the quest. He would get some other work to do. And—life would be different henceforth. He looked at the crystal. The train of bubbles had ceased. He seized the bowl and shook it in a frenzy of fear. With a stick of polished wood he shifted the position of the crystal. From a little phial he poured a drop of some liquid into the bowl, but to no use. The crystal lay torpid, mocking, and the bubbles came no more. He drew his breath sharply between his teeth. This was the end of all his hopes. Many times before he had been stopped thus on the threshold, but to-night he had made sure of success. And there was nothing else to try. He knew no more.

A blind rage possessed him. He asked so little of heaven—surely that little might be given him? Just that one experiment might succeed. It meant so little to heaven. It meant so much to him. It meant so much to his wife. This accomplished, he would turn lover again, and they would go together through the world giving happiness with one hand and gathering it in with the other. It was the whole of life. With this in his hand he might rule the world. Sorrow would vanish at his coming and king's ransoms would pay her going. It meant so much to him, so little to heaven. The parrot repetition woke him to sanity. Fool! What was he asking? The whole of life. The strain and the disappointment were turning his brain. So little to heaven! It was heaven's own keys he prayed

for. Sobered, he rose. The way was clear before him. The visionary must become the everyday workman, the king uncrowned fulfil the tasks of the slave. He reached out his hand for the bowl that held so many hopes. It should go. All trace of to-day's madness must be removed to make way for to-morrow's common sense. The false crystal lay, blue and shining, at the bottom of the clear, jelly-like matter that had taken so long to prepare. The chemist gazed on it with the eyes of one who shuts a door never to be opened again.

For a moment he looked so at it, and then bent eagerly down. A little bubble left the sparkling mass and floated slowly upwards. He held his breath, and hardly dared to think lest he should stop this miracle that worked itself for him. Then, as a steady stream began once more to leave the crystal, he fell back in his chair exhausted by the violence of his emotions. In a moment or two he waked as from a dream and looked to find waking's disappointment. But still the crystal lay giving off a continuous stream of bubbles.

“How beautiful is the heart's desire,” said the chemist, leaning forward to watch them as they floated upwards to the surface and vanished. In the brilliantly-lit room they shone like living eyes. He felt a sort of tenderness for them as though they were indeed live things.

“And they *are* alive!” his thoughts cried jubilantly. “Not only alive, but Life itself—and *I* made them! *I* made them! Death's rival am *I*—his master.” With a shaking hand he drew the bowl nearer to him. The bubbles streamed merrily upwards, he felt giddy, and held on to the side of the table to steady himself. Absurd, half-forgotten songs rang through his brain with insistent metre. He felt oddly conscious of the theatrical tendency of the situation. He seemed to stand aloof, to see the scene from some height above—the silent, intensely-lit room and himself, clutching at the table, bent forward with eyes distraught, gazing at the scintillating globe. And, all the while, irresistibly, yet also with the feeling of an actor who knows the words suited to the situation, he muttered beneath his breath—

“Heaven's own keys! Heaven's own keys!”

The door opened softly and the chemist's wife crept in. There were dark circles under her eyes and her pretty hair was pushed back. She came forward, with her little cold hands held pleadingly before her.

“I'm so frightened,” she said piteously. “It is quite dark upstairs, and the fire has gone out. I sat and watched it die,

and all the room seemed full of ghosts that mocked at me. Here it is light——” She broke off suddenly. Her husband had not noticed her. He sat clutching at the table and staring at the glowing globe in front of him. All the while he kept muttering in a sort of rhythmic chant that, even as she listened, grew louder till his voice assumed a jubilant note that was horrible to her—

“Heaven’s own keys! Heaven’s own keys!”

It died away again in indistinct murmurings. She made a rapid step towards him.

“What is it?” she asked; but he paid no heed to her. The room was unbearably hot. She went to the window and let in a flood of morning air. The dawn was beginning to show faintly over the housetops opposite. Usually he would have impatiently closed the window and begged her to let him pursue his researches in peace. Now he gave no sign. She stood looking out.

“It is another day,” she said wearily. She felt an indefinable fear coming over her. The feeling grew, and resisting idly at first the inclination to turn and face her husband, she finally found it almost impossible to remain looking outwards, and turned suddenly towards the room. He had risen and stood looking down at the globe. She came towards the table and looked into it beside him. At the bottom lay a small blue speck, that grew smaller even as she looked at it. Suddenly it vanished altogether. She looked up at her husband involuntarily. He gave no sign for a moment, save that his very breathing seemed to stop. The woman felt the silence and the stillness grow unbearable. With a voice that seemed to her shrill and unnatural she cried his name. He turned and looked at her. He tried to speak, but the words would not come. He pointed to the bowl and strove to speak again. Suddenly he clutched at her, failed to reach her, and staggering back, dropped heavily into his chair, his head falling forward on the table. She sprang to his side, overturning as she did so the gleaming bowl. Even at that time her resentment against the interloper held good, and she was conscious of a flush of satisfaction at the discomfiture of the enemy. The fluid poured slowly over the table and put forth a shining arm towards the chemist’s head. The woman raised him tenderly that his hair might not be wetted, calling his name in low soft tones as one might hush a child. She placed herself between him and the broken globe, that his first impressions as he revived might not be painful.

“It’s all right, dear,” she said—“it’s all right.” She had been

holding him close against her breast; now she looked down at his face. In terror she let him fall back in the chair. There was no need to screen the bowl from him. An eternal curtain had fallen. She knelt sobbing by his side. A mouse leapt from the table and hurried away into the shadows. The chemist's wife shuddered.

"I thought it was dead," she said.

ETHEL CLIFFORD.

Father Murdoch's Last Mass.

THE Host which he had so often gladly saluted, when the little chapel of Ennisgarrett was bright with candles and tinsel-gilt, Michael Hooley, peasant, desired to taste once more, as he lay dying. And Father Murdoch, who for nine years had said the masses of Ennisgarrett, heard of his longing, and resolved to grant it.

Wexford was taken, and Oliver's men were thick on the country-side, and every priest carried his life in his hand. But Father Murdoch's blood had not yet come to the steady coolness of old age, and, albeit he had not learnt to regard sudden death as a thing desirable, he had not either learnt to be afraid of it. He had ever known in his heart that a frocked priest can meet his end like a warrior, and that, when his hour came, he could in himself show forth the fact. And when, in his hiding-place, he heard that Michael Hooley was about to die, he knew that the hour was come indeed, and went forth to it with all calm.

Being a brave man and yet young, he fell into the fault of most brave men, and was a little over-brave. He trusted all to his shepherd disguise, and left the hiding-place at noon, taking no man with him. There was not one in that outlaw company but would most gladly have gone with him, and given his own life, had need arisen, in his priest's stead; but the Father urged that peril, and not safety, lay in numbers, and commanded them to let him depart alone.

Hooley's hut lay low in the village; but the priest sought first to what was left of the chapel, little more than a ruin now, and solitary as the inner side of a grave, and there he consecrated, not in haste, and with no sign of fear, although he divined that this viaticum for the soul of Michael Hooley was to be for his as well. And, as he prayed, the thoughts which rose in his heart

were not the thoughts he had always supposed would arise as a preparation for death; but, being brave man first and priest afterwards, he felt some element in his bravery itself—a preparation for death. And he remembered that there is a saying of Musonius Rufus which runs: "Take the chance of dying nobly whilst thou canst."

He rose from his knees and looked at the empty places, and peopled them with ghosts, and as he went down the narrow aisle between them, the voice in his brain closed the sentence: "Lest, after a little, death indeed come to thee, but a noble death no more."

So he went out into the hazy October afternoon.

The road to Ennisgarrett stretched away downhill, and pleasantly, and of no great length; and Father Murdoch stepped forward with good heart and a cheerful countenance, for, close under his shepherd's coat, he bore the Host.

Three of the Protector's men came up from Ennisgarrett, walking their horses on the hill, and they met with a seeming shepherd, just where the road narrows before it enters the village, and is darkened on the left hand by the copse. The army was even then supposed on the move for Ross, and none knew what these men did in Ennisgarrett.

Despite the bitter havoc, the village still held women—and whiskey; and that man of God, the Lord-Lieutenant, was forced to ignore much that happed beyond reach of his stern eyes.

However it might be, the troopers looked sharply on the solitary wayfarer.

"Who art thou?" demanded one of them, who was named Habbakuk Veale, drawing rein and staring through the haze into the priest's eyes. As he gazed, he saw only the face of a man; but Father Murdoch, gazing at him, saw death, riding on a horse, as St. John in the Revelation.

"Who art thou? And what business takes thee to Ennisgarrett?" said Trooper Habbakuk Veale, who had drunk much, and was in mood to challenge anything.

It was chiefly idle curiosity which moved him to demand; but Father Murdoch, trembling for what he bore beneath his mantle, saw suspicion in the soldier's eye, piercing through the cloth and reaching the Host itself.

"I go," he answered in a voice leagues calmer than his mind, "to visit a friend who lies sick. Let me pray you not to stay me."

And he moved, as if to go farther, into the haze of the dipping

road ; but Habbakuk was minded to detain him longer in conversation.

"Art carrying," said Habbakuk, "some papist-charm to heal him in his sickness ? Thine eyes have a look of something thou wouldest conceal from godly men. Yea," cried Habbakuk, waxing eloquent, "and I charge thee to straightway deliver it up, lest a worse thing come upon thee ! Is it not written, there is nothing secret that shall not be made plain ? Neither is there anything covered which shall not be brought to light ?"

Now Father Murdoch's lips moved, saying : "In te, Domine, speravi," and aloud, he added, "In the Name of God, friend, I bear no papist-charm. Wherefore let me pass on my way." And he looked full into the soldier's eyes, and moved again to go forward.

It chanced that one of these three troopers was apostate, having been trained in childhood in the Catholic faith. And there was a tone in this shepherd's voice and a look on his face that told him what manner of shepherd was here. So, being yet a little afraid of the holy things he had forsaken, he spoke now to Habbakuk Veale :

"Let the man go. We have already wasted time enough."

"The man shall go indeed," quoth Habbakuk, blustering by reason of drink and woman's lips. "Yet not before I have tried if there be any way of wickedness in him. Dismount thou, Barzillai Johnson, and search this shepherd."

"Dismount thyself," replied Barzillai with bitterness, "for who made thee a ruler over us ?"

Which thing, relating to an ever-burning point between them, might not, at any time, be judged irrelevant ; yet, because of the lengthening shadows, Habbakuk temporized. He leaned from the saddle, and was about to seize the shepherd by the cloak, when Father Murdoch's hand went to his breast.

It was the work of an instant. Habbakuk knew the desperate courage of the wild Irish.

"The miscreant goes armed !" cried he, and out flashed his pistol.

The priest fell, with a groan.

"Not too soon !" gasped Habbakuk, across the smoke, "for as the Lord liveth, there was but a step between me and death ! Let him lie ! We will ride on."

"Shall I not first dismount," said James Mylam the apostate, "and take his weapon from him ?"

"That is if he had a weapon," said Bazillai Johnson, who hated Habbakuk, and remembered with calm thankfulness that Oliver was stern in demanding explanation of the death of strangers.

And he and Habbakuk rode on, wrangling ; but James Mylam dismounted and bent over the body of the priest.

As he opened his cloak his hand came in contact with a little silver box, and he trembled very much.

"I do not think," cried he to Habbakuk, "that this man could have had a weapon. You have killed a priest."

"Has he anything on him of value?" demanded Habbakuk.

And the apostate answered, "Nothing!"

"Ah, well!" cried Habbakuk, laughing aloud to conceal the fear of death that he had suffered ; "if he be a priest, he has said his last mass." And he rode on, still wrangling with Barzillai ; but Father Murdoch's ears had caught the word, and he opened his eyes and looked into the eyes of James Mylam.

"What said that man of the mass?" asked Father Murdoch ; and his voice was very faint.

"That thou," answered Mylam, speaking thickly, "hadst no more to say."

The Father gazed at him serenely. "It is false," said Father Murdoch ; "go thou and tell him so!"

And he clenched his hands over the little silver box, thinking that it must surely be snatched from him ; but Mylam had fallen on his knees. For early beliefs reappear in us again and again, and now he was muttering mechanically the old salutation to the Host—"A thousand welcomes, Christ our Saviour!"

But Murdoch's eyes had closed again, and he was to all appearance dead. After a moment, Mylam rose, and drew the priest's cloak softly over the little silver box. He could not have taken it now had it been made of diamonds ; but he had shaken off the awe of the moment, and flung himself into the saddle, and rode after the others. Looking back, he saw Father Murdoch lie still, and was fully assured that he was now dead.

Habbakuk Veale and Barzillai Johnson were already wrangling upon another matter.

Murdoch did not return to consciousness until some minutes after their horses' hoofs had died away. He lay gathering his senses one by one.

He had enough leechcraft to be sure that he bled internally, and had but a little while to live. Not an hour perhaps, but long enough to reach Ennisgarrett, and lay the Host on Michael Hooley's dying tongue. For he had yet a mass to say. So he arose, and came, by the strength of his will, into Ennisgarrett.

But whereas he had before borne the Host secretly in fear, so now the calm delirium of death had come upon him, and he held aloft the little silver pyx in his two hands over his head, and gazed

straight before him, like a man who sees a holy sight. And he knew not if he met any man on the skirts of the village, for he was conscious of nothing until he stood by Michael Hooley's bed.

Michael Hooley opened his dying eyes, and looked upon him and said: "Is it your blessed ghost, Father, that God has sent to lead me into Paradise?" For a lad had passed even now by what had seemed the priest's dead body, and had fled, and told the villagers; and to Michael Hooley too the tale had reached.

But Father Murdoch answered him: "I am no ghost. But I have given my life to bring thee this. Take now and eat."

And, saying the customary words, he drew out the wafer and laid it on the sick man's tongue.

And Michael Hooley marvelled, even while he blessed God, that the Father had neither said the *Confiteor* nor confessed him; nevertheless, being weary, he adored in silence, with closed eyes, and ate, asking nothing. And when he looked again, he was alone.

With Father Murdoch still remained the calm delirium of the dying, though his false strength failed him fast. And, knowing that he must die, he said to himself, "I will return to the chapel and die there."

So, with this purpose clear and set in his mind, he went out, and passed the door, and, still bearing the pyx, began to ascend the hill. And, as he went, he said Psalm a Hundred and Forty-eight, as the custom is; but when he had come to the *Gloria Patri*, he perceived that it was night.

By the roadside, where it narrows before it enters the village, and is shadowed on the right hand by the cypresses, he fell again; and this time he rose no more. But, with the last effort, he felt for the remaining wafer, and laid it on his tongue; and at once he was in the little chapel, where all was as before Oliver came, and candles blazed, and incense-smoke was thick.

His people, crowding about the chancel-step, seemed to desire of him the Sacrament; but he knew—not knowing why—that they had come too late. And stretching out his hand, he dismissed them, saying: "Ite: missa est!"

In a little time came stragglers out of Ennisgarrett full of fear and hope at Michael Hooley's tale. And when they found their priest, lying dead, with the empty pyx upon his heart, they knew how the ghost of Father Murdoch had found no rest in Paradise till it had borne to the longing of Michael Hooley the Body of Christ the Lord.

The Two Twilights.

JEMMY OTWAY went down to the Lancashire coast for a month. His friends said he was going for a holiday ; he himself stated that he was in search of subjects. He was an artist. Sometimes his pictures sold, more often they did not ; but as he was young and not entirely dependent on his art, this lack of appreciation did not as yet greatly trouble him. He went in June, passing from the heat of town to a cool liquid air, a wide sandy shore, a sea grey, flashing white, with shadows of lucent emerald—the Irish sea with its breath of life.

Visitors are rare in the midsummer month. Otway seemed to be the only stranger in the little place as he strolled along the beach that evening after dinner, watching the changing opal of sea and sky in the lingering sunset, till the weltering plain was dim silver, with a vivid gleam of steel-blue light where the day had passed to the under-world.

“The Raven’s Twilight,” he murmured. “Yes, the old Rabbis named it well. I have half a mind to get up to-morrow and see their Dove’s Twilight, the dawn. There are good effects here.”

Later, as he turned in at the gate of his lodgings, where a tall white poplar shook its downy leaves, he looked back at the darkening sea, still lit westward by that narrow bluish gleam as though a sword lay along the waves.

“Don’t know which twilight I like best,” he said aloud ; “extraordinary effects here ! Anything—Corrievreckan’s Mermaid—might come out of that Raven’s Twilight !”

When the first grey feather of the Dove’s Twilight streaked the east, Otway walked out into the dawn, pausing a moment at the door to note the harmony of the white poplar with the pallor of sea and sky. A little morning breeze ruffled the leaves, turning their under-surface to the faint light, so that they fluttered like pale moths against the soft grey crinkled background of the sleeping sea. Flights of birds passed restlessly

to and fro, gulls and others. A dusky cat played hide-and-seek in the laurel bushes in the garden. Far off, dim headlands loomed through the morning mists. The light grew, clear soft white light, with the diaphanous shadows of dawn. The sea, a vast grey pearl, lay gently heaving; a narrow line of foam visible away on the sand. Here and there along that line of foam dark silhouettes moved slowly, seeming scarcely larger than the gulls. They were shrimpers, gathering their harvest from the receding tide.

Suddenly on the horizon, where cloud mingled with sea, broke a ring of red-gold light. Other glittering streaks appeared higher, streaks of paler gold. The cloud separated into many clouds, with rifts of blue that spread as the gold light spread, till all the east was bright while yet the sea was dusky pearl. Otway sat down on a boulder and awaited the sunrising. This Dove's Twilight was long and lingering as the Raven's.

“‘The orange light of widening morn,’ ” he said, throwing a green pebble into a tide-pool. “Now, if I could get something that would look well against it, something——”

He stopped, for there on the left, dark against the vaporous gold of the dawn, coming over the sand with naked silent feet, was a figure fantastic as a dream.

“How picturesque — how extraordinarily picturesque!” he muttered. “Is it a bat? A woman? Or a shadow? What in the world——?” Then with sudden compassion, “Poor old girl!”

She was one of the shrimpers and was going home, her shrimping-net carried over her shoulder in such wise that it had the effect of wings, spectral, bat-like. Her tattered garments, sea-stained and brown, the colour of the wrack that lay in shrivelled heaps upon the beach, clung about her heavy with sea-water, dripping at every step she took. Over her head was tied a woollen kerchief of the same sombre colour, and from under it her eyes looked out, dark, sunken, yet still bright; a brightness that startled, for the face was wrinkled as the sand—the face of an old, old woman. Perhaps she looked older than she was; the scanty locks that fell about her forehead were grey, not white. Yet as she passed noiselessly by, so withered was her face, so toil-worn her hands, so thin her bare feet, so gaunt and strange her aspect, she was most truly a shadow—bat-like, grotesque, pathetic; the shadow of life, old age.

Otway sprang up and hurried after her.

“Here,” he cried, “stop a minute, mother! Just half a second!”

She turned, and the sun rose and glittered over the sea and across the sand and lit the forlorn figure in its dripping rags.

"I want to make a drawing of you," the artist went on eagerly. "I want to paint you just as you are, with that shrimping-net, standing out here on the beach. I'll give you a shilling an hour, three hours at a time. That's three shillings a day for as long as I shall be over the drawing; can't tell how long yet. Will you come? Come after breakfast, about nine o'clock. I'll be ready here."

As vague shapes of seaweed rise dimly to sight in the wave, so rose in the old woman's face an indescribable expression that changed the withered mask to life. Then the look sank as the seaweed sinks in deep water.

"Ay, I'll come," she said slowly, and the young man observed her with increasing interest. "When mun I come?"

"To-day—this morning, if you can. Come at nine. I'll be here."

"Ay," she repeated with a nod, "I'll come."

"That's all right," responded Otway cheerfully, watching her walk away up the beach, her garments flapping against her thin ankles, clinging to her shrivelled figure, the sharpness of her shoulder-blades clearly defined under the wet brown rags, the shrimping-net spread outward and upward pinion-like beyond her head and shoulders.

"Jove!" he muttered, "she is like a bat—she is a bat! A human bat! I'll make a good thing of it. Poor old girl!"

Feeling greatly elated, he walked to the nearest headland, two miles away, had a swim from a fisherman's boat there, and came back to breakfast.

When he returned to the beach at nine o'clock with his tools, the bat-like apparition stood there motionless, awaiting him; her shadow, fantastic as herself, thrown before her on the pebbles.

"You are punctual, mother," said Otway, setting up his easel. "Yes, stand just as you are now. That's it. Capital!"

He worked on steadily for an hour, transferring that figure, dark against the sheen of the sea, to his canvas. The day was fair and blue, and all round them was rejoicing life. The song of the salt breeze, the rhythmic laughter of the waves as the tide swung in over the sands, azure butterflies fluttering in the sunshine by the tufts of yarrow that grew between the stones just above high-water mark, gulls wheeling far out over the dazzle of tumbling water. And amidst all this brightness stood that weird shape, silent, almost phantasmal, beside Otway's easel; a thing apart from light and life.

Another hour passed.

"I'll tell you what, mother," said the young man suddenly, "you must be tired, and I am getting hungry. Sit down, and we'll have something to eat."

The old woman sat down, while Otway opened a basket beside him.

"'Tis long sin' I touched one o' these," she said, breaking silence for the first time during the sitting.

At the sound of her voice he looked up. She was turning a tube of rose madder round and round in her claw-like fingers and the expression he had noticed in the dawn had again risen in her face.

"I've seen 'em in th' shop windows," she went on dreamily, her eyes fixed on the tube in her hand, "but I hannot touched 'em."

As she spoke, a horrid dread shot through his mind. Had some other fellow discovered and painted this wonderful old bat? He put the question.

"Ay, I wur painted once," she answered still dreamily. "'Tis long ago; nigh forty year."

"Oh, I see," greatly relieved. "Here you are!" handing her a plate. "And here's a glass of Burgundy. You try it. It's good stuff. Warms one's heart!"

The old woman laid down the colour and took the things he gave her, eating slowly as in reverie, though good food must have been strange to her, and wine impossible.

"It's like feeding a mummy," thought Otway. "I wonder what she was like forty years ago." Then, perceiving that her spirit had flown back over those forty years, he said gently, "Drink your wine, mother."

She obeyed mechanically.

"I forgot I wur keeping yo' waiting."

"Oh, I did not mean that!" he cried. "Not a bit! I am in no hurry. I doubt whether I shall do any more to-day."

Looking at his sketch, he decided to leave it as it was for the present; and giving the old woman three shillings, asked her if she could come early next morning.

"Before breakfast," he explained. "At five o'clock. I want to paint you in the dawn. I've got the rough sketch in now. From five to eight would just do, and then we will have breakfast together. Will those hours suit you?"

She nodded.

"I'll come."

Then she looked at the money in her wrinkled palm. "Yo've given o'er much. I hannot stood three hour."

"It's all right. It will be three shillings a time, whether I keep you the three hours or not."

She murmured her thanks and went away, leaving Otway regarding his canvas with satisfaction.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "Very good! Wonder who painted her forty years ago. I'll bet my picture beats his, whoever he was!" Then he took his drawing indoors.

The next dawn saw him sitting before his easel on the beach, noting the pearliness of the light, and trying tints. So absorbed was he that the old shrimper's voice startled him, speaking close to his shoulder.

"I amna late, am I?"

"Oh no, it is barely five. I was studying all that," with a comprehensive wave of his hand towards the sea.

She took up her position silently, and Otway selected his brushes and went to work, striving, with the exhilaration of the dawn in his veins, to place upon his canvas that figure, less a living being than a shadow on the sunlit beach; the pitiful shadow of human old age in the daily renewal of the youth of the world.

"Have you lived here all your life, mother?" he presently inquired.

"Ever sin' I wur born."

"Ah," searching among his colours for the one he wanted. "'In Argolis beside the echoing sea.'"

He glanced at his model as he lazily quoted the line, and saw a faint tremor pass over the old woman's face.

"I know yon poetry," she said suddenly.

"Do you?" in astonishment.

"Ay, I know it well. Argolis," she pronounced the name clearly, easily; north-country folk have an aptitude for remembering names,—"is a place o'er in Greece, wheer they paint pictures an' cut stones. That's wheer Argolis is, beside th' sea loike this. Ay, I know yon poetry. But I hannot heard it fur forty year!"

There are some men and women who attract confidences. Jemmy Otway was one. Intuitively people felt he would understand whatever tale might be poured into his ears, and they talked accordingly.

"It wur when I wur painted," she went on, gazing over the sea, "forty year ago. That's when I heard it. He wur here three month, an' th' place wur different then. It wurna cluttered up wi' houses loike as now. We wur both on us young i' those days."

"'We!'" thought Otway.

"But I munnot weary yo' wi' talk o' forty year ago," she said, rousing herself and looking at him.

"I am never tired of listening, mother."

Her glance fell on the colours he was sorting.

"It wur seeing them an' hearing yo' speak o' Argolis as made me talk on't."

"I like to hear you. I am interested."

Which was true. Otway was interested, not so much in the old woman's story as in the old woman herself. She said no more, however, and the hours passed till eight o'clock. Otway jumped up.

"Wait here," he told her, "while I see about breakfast."

The gate with the white poplar was not more than thirty yards away, and reflecting that his landlady might possibly object to wait on his shrimper, the young man carried out the breakfast-tray himself. He observed that his model made no demur about accepting his hospitality, but seemed to take the situation as perfectly natural, like a tame creature offered food by man; and this silent acquiescence without protest or question, made the odd companionship easy and pleasant to both.

So day by day, as the Twilight of the Dove broke over the sea, that gaunt shape, in its Raven's Twilight of life, stood by Otway's easel, while the shadow of it grew upon the canvas; then shared his breakfast and departed on bare silent feet, to return with the dawn. The young man felt the piteousness of that forlorn figure in its "looped and windowed raggedness," standing patiently that its very poverty and age might bring it bread. And she had been young! She did not speak again of that time forty years ago; indeed, she seldom uttered a word; but there was a sense of friendship between the two that rendered speech unnecessary.

Otway made other studies too, in the long June days; fisher-folk and their children, the boats, the lights of sunset and sunrise with their subtle changes. In short, he worked hard, and was well content with the results of his sojourn. For the month was drawing to a close, and the picture of the shrimper approaching completion. He said as much to the old woman one shimmering morning. She nodded gravely, and, for the first time, came up and looked over his shoulder at the painting. The young man felt slightly uncomfortable. There are, it is true, some men and women whom old age and poverty drug into a sort of enjoyment of their miseries. They have never felt much; they feel still less. But this bat-like creature was not one of these. She was a distinct personality; of that Otway had been vaguely aware all along, and he mentally stigmatised himself as a brute when those black eyes gazed steadily

at the shadowy presentment on the canvas. Yet the painting of those poor rags, those barely covered bones, that withered face, had been gain to her—given her money that she needed. He had but done as most do. One expects some return for one's outlay. Few are the givers who do not exact some reasonable reward, if only in the form of deference. "All these will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Besides, the arrangement was best for the old woman's self-respect. So much money for the permission to exhibit her wretchedness, that he might gain glory thereby and perhaps gold also. It was fair enough,—of course it was fair enough. Yet he wished she had not been so shrivelled and skinny, so ragged and silent, and had not that memory of Argolis.

"Well, mother?" he said interrogatively, but with unusual meekness in his tone.

"Ay, 'tis me sure enow! 'Tis me," came slowly from the sunken old mouth. Then the black eyes looked wistfully into his grey ones. "I'd loike yo' to see th' picture o' me forty year ago. I've gotten it safe."

"Have you? I should like to see it very much."

She nodded. "I'll bring it. He wur going to take it away wi' him, but he wur sent for i' a hurry one day to th' Castle,—o'er th' headland. I reckon you've seen it?"

"Yes."

"An' he left it wi' me, fur it wurna dry an' his landlady wur meddlesome. He said he'd fetch it on his way back to Lunnon, but he didna come back. He went to Lunnon wi' th' Castle people, forty year ago."

"Will you show it to me now, mother?"

"Ay, I con fetch it i' a minute. He wur a great painter. Yo' con see his name i' th' corner. I've seen it i' th' papers many a toime. I con read," this with a touch of pride. "Th' great folk set a power o' store by him."

She turned and walked away, an eagerness in the bare old feet, and Otway sat contemplating his own handiwork, wondering who could be the painter of forty years ago who had lingered three months "in Argolis beside the echoing sea."

In about ten minutes the old woman returned, carrying the picture wrapped in a ragged green tablecloth. Slipping the cloth off the canvas she set it up. For an instant Otway's astonishment held him dumb.

"Aureole!" he cried.

Oh, there was no need to look at the name in the corner! Who but Aureole could paint with that powdery touch, as though he

had dipped his brush in the down of a butterfly's wing and so laid on the colour? And such colour! The glowing bloom of the girl, black-eyed, black-haired, against a translucent evening sky and opal sea. Otway placed the picture upon his easel, removing his own.

"You were a very handsome young woman, mother."

"Ay, I wur that!" with subdued triumph; "an' he wur a great painter."

"Yes, all the world acknowledges it."

"I know," with a nod. "When he died awhile back, I see it on th' placards at th' station. Th' papers wur full on him! I bowt three o' them Lunnon papers an' read a' about the funeral an' th' great folks at it. It wur a grand funeral!"

"I was there," said Otway, "though I am not one of the great folks. I went because he was a great painter."

"Did yo'?" the black eyes surveyed him with increased interest. He looked again at the signature.

"This picture is worth a lot of money, mother. Enough to make you comfortable."

"Ay, I know, fur I wur offered a sight o' brass fur it by a gentleman long sin', but I wouldna sell it. Theer's my name on th' neck o' th' dress. It looks loike embroidery, but it isna. He said it wur my name i' Greek letters. I mind that well, fur he said Argolis wur Greek an' they wrote loike that i' Argolis. My name is Rhoda."

Otway bent closer and perceived that the seeming embroidery was what she said. The name suited the glowing beauty of the portrait; the county produced that type now and then, he knew. Rhoda! And Aureole had painted her in her Dove's Twilight of youth against the sunsetting. Strange that he himself—Jemmy Otway—should have reversed the twilights, painting her in her Raven's Twilight against the dawn. But he hardly thought of his own picture beside the great painter's work with its marvellous brilliancy as of jewels, yet with that indescribable powderiness—that bloom of the ripe peach, which was Aureole's sign manual.

"How on earth did he do it?" muttered Otway.

"He wur a great painter!" reiterated the figure at his elbow, its rags fluttering in the soft sea-breeze.

The young man drew a long breath and stood up.

"Well, mother, if ever you wish to sell this portrait of yourself, write to me and I'll see you get its value. I will give you my address. It is a splendid painting. I am not rich enough to buy it myself, but I can find those who are. Remember that you could live comfortably all your life on the money it would bring."

"It mout pay fur my burying," she said thoughtfully. "I dunnot loike parish burying."

"It would give you enough to live on and pay for that as well," replied Otway. "Think over it. You can get the parson to write to me if you like, you know."

"Nay, I'll write mysen. It'll nobbut be fur my burying."

"Well, give me a day or two's time when you do, because I might be away from home and the letter would have to follow me. I will not fail you."

"Thank yo'," she answered in simple faith, and her confidence was quite justified; Otway was trustworthy.

He returned to the contemplation of the portrait.

"It is splendid," he said with a sigh of admiration and regret, "splendid! I am glad I have seen it, mother. You were a handsome girl."

The old woman's eyes lit as the spirit glowed for an instant through its mask of toil-worn clay.

"Ay, I wur a good-looking lass. Ay, I wur!"

Then she picked up the ragged tablecloth. Otway took it from her.

"One moment," he said. "I will wrap it up for you."

He stood, cloth in hand, regarding the portrait for perhaps five minutes.

"A wonderful painting!" he murmured. Then aloud, "Shall I carry it home for you?"

She hesitated, and thinking that possibly she did not wish him to see her home, he folded the cloth round the picture and gave it to her, saying:

"I shall always think of you as Aureole painted you. Not as I have done."

Again the glow came into the old face.

"Ay, I wanted yo' to see it. He wur a great painter, an' I wur a handsome lass—forty year ago!"

She went away with the portrait, and Otway took his tools indoors. There he set his picture on the easel and looked at it.

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" he cried. "It's Villon! It's la belle Heaulmière!" He clutched his hair tragically. "Yes, that's what it is!"

He paced the room once or twice, then sat down in front of his picture. It was good—very good. That poverty-stricken old age in pitiful contrast to the pale glory of the Dove's Twilight; a figure hooded, mysterious; the far-gleaming sea visible through the reticulations of the shrimping-net rising wing-like behind her, its pole and cross-bar sable against the sunrise. A figure

pathetic in its scanty ragged garments, black-brown like the sea-tang and the wrack ; its thin hands and feet, its wrinkled face—there against the misty gold of the dawn, the sparkle of the sea.

“La belle Heaulmière !” repeated Otway. “Poor old girl ! It seems a shame somehow.”

He sighed impatiently, got up, pocketed his sketch-book and went out, telling his landlady he should not be back till dinner. At six he returned, and again contemplated his picture.

“Poor old girl !” he said. Then he paused. “I am a sentimental fool ! And Aureole was no great shakes apart from his art. Two more days would finish it.”

Yet the figure seemed to appeal to him in its forlornness. To have been that ! To be this ! Her Raven’s Twilight not passing into soft veiling of darkness and light of stars ; but held up for all men to see. Otway rose, and taking his brushes, swept any—every colour this way and that over the painting, completely obliterating the picture. This done, he proceeded to pack his other drawings. After all, he would have left in three days—might as well go now. There was an evening train that would just suit him.

He had dinner, sent his luggage to the station, and strolled out along the beach to seek the old woman. The tide was running out, and he knew she would be among the shrimpers. There was no hurry ; his train was not due till nearly ten. He watched the sunset die in rose and crimson, and the wonderful west fade to orange, to primrose, then to crystalline green—clear—shining ; while far out over the sands the glimmering sea filled the air with a soft murmur.

“The sea of the Sagas,” said Otway aloud, “and it sings runes. I must come here again. I could do something with that song in my ears.”

Then he saw the line of shrimpers coming slowly up to the beach in the green twilight ; his model was last.

“Here, mother,” he said, “is the money for the next two sittings, and here are envelopes with my address on them—two in case you lose one. I am going away to-night.”

“Eh, but I’m sorry.”

“So am I. But I shall come back next year, perhaps sooner.”

“Nay, yo’ll noan do that. Yo’ painters ne’er come back.”

Otway was silent a moment, perceiving that her thoughts had gone backward over forty years. Forty years ! and here was the Raven’s Twilight as beautiful as when Aureole painted it behind the head of the girl called Rhoda. And here stood Rhoda in her Raven’s Twilight.

"I wished to tell you, mother," said the young man lightly after that moment's pause, "that since seeing that portrait of you to-day, I have thought it hardly fair to paint you now, so I have rubbed out my picture."

"Yo've rubbed it out? A' your painting?"

"Yes, all of it."

"An' yo've gotten nowt fur a' th' brass yo' paid me! Here, I conna take this!" She held out a claw-like hand with the money he had just given her.

"Oh, you must. I agreed for two more sittings. And I have learnt a deal by painting that picture of you. It was good practice for me. So the only portrait of you now is that one of forty years ago."

Another minute's silence; then the old woman—more bat-like than ever against the clear green of the western sky—said slowly:

"I couldna ha' believed it, but I'm glad on't. Ay, I'm glad on't! I wish yo' luck. 'Tis main good o' yo'."

"It's nothing," he replied. "I am glad you are pleased. Shake hands, mother, my train is about due. And I shall come back next year. For once you will be wrong, I shall come back."

He grasped the skinny fingers, then ran up the beach to the station, where his train was just slowing. As it bore him away, he looked out and saw the familiar figure standing on the beach in the green of the Raven's Twilight. Yet oddly enough, he seemed to see her—not old, bat-like—but as the girl Rhoda forty years ago.

C. L. ANTROBUS.



The Trappist Monk.

I.

FRANZEL MAYNEHR was Dane by birth, but his parents hailed from Suabia. He had always been a lout, slow, apparently incapable of comprehending things, but, withal, so docile and stupidly obedient, that his mother gazing contemptuously at him over her knitting had one day remarked, "He shall be a monk. It is the only thing for him." Her husband had offered no protest. Experience had taught him that the good woman, over her knitting, uttered only oracles.

So it was settled. Franzel, when told, smiled, in the soft loutish acquiescence they had grown wont to expect from him. The years passed, and the subject was never broached again till the youth had reached the age of eighteen years. He had spent his time lounging round the farm lands—hoeing, digging, sheep-shearing—anything that the moment offered. On his eighteenth birthday he was standing ankle deep in turnips, cutting cow fodder. As the sun told mid-day, he wiped his brow, threw down the broad-bladed hoe, and lounged clumsily across the meadow to the house. He saw his mother in the kitchen, and leant against the lintel watching her, as her quick hands peeled and washed the potatoes.

"Mother," he said slowly, "I am eighteen." "Aye," was the tart rejoinder, "eighteen thou art and fit for naught."

"I am going," he continued, unmoved, "up to the monastery yonder, to-night. Mayhap I shall never see thee again." The woman dropped her potatoes and stared at him. "Holy Virgin!" she gasped, "when didst thou get that notion?" He only smiled, the same half-empty, half-inscrutable smile as of old. Looking on him, his mother seemed to follow the pensiveness of his gaze back through the past, recalling vividly the day when she had told him he should join the monks. "To think," she muttered, "that it should have stuck like that; and never a word,

never a word breathed by him all these years." As she looked at him still in wonder, she felt a sudden respect for him grow up in her, and a new strange tugging at the strings of maternal yearning that made her think of the day when he first lay a babe on her breast. She was a little woman with a red pinched face, faded black hair, thin lips, and deep-set, hollow eyes rimmed by pale gray circles which seemed insensibly to vanish into the maze of wrinkles which surmounted her high cheek bones. She peeled a few potatoes, rapidly, silently, giving herself time to recover from emotions which from their very uniqueness frightened her to a sense that was as foreboding of some evil. At last she turned.

"Well, my son, thou knowest best, thou and God. Go, and the saints and Mary protect thee." He embraced her calmly, without enthusiasm or any apparent shadow of regret, and as he was, without bundle, with nothing but his staff, trudged off up the hill to the monastery of the Trappists.

Had he been asked he could have given no coherent reason for his act. It was simply a part of him, the fulfilment of a function in the exercise of which his nature instinctively acquiesced. From the time he had first been told of his destiny he had accepted it, unquestioning, and in his own mind resolved that it would be time to fulfil it when he became eighteen. No sense of mission actively inspired him, though at times he felt, with a faint inward glow, that it was a good thing to look forward to. His spiritual training had been developed by no evolution based on antagonism. His life had been singularly pure and simple, far removed from the callous immorality which so often finds its way into peasant homes in England and Germany. And so the village priest had been content that he should drift placidly through the ordinary Catholic instruction, and it had grown up with him, as much a thing of habit and as careless of analysis as his smock.

He stood at the gates of the monastery, waiting and looking down on his old home. He could see them all standing there watching. Beyond them the marshy dunes stretched to the sea, which was just visible through the thin grey line of poplars fringing the sand-hills. It struck him then for the first time that he was leaving it all that a new life, strange and with unknown, perhaps unhappy elements, was opening its door to him. But he had no time to pursue the thought. The door had opened. He was ushered and duly admitted as a lay mission member. The end of a year of initiation saw him on board a barque bound for Natal.

II.

THE drift at the Nyalwa River had always been renowned, even among the Kaffirs, as opening into a country of phenomenal fertility. As one crossed, now, towards the middle of the year 188-, the country spread away beyond like one huge garden. Oats, wheat, mealies, Kaffir corn, in all stages of growth, waved in luxuriant freshness from the drift to the kraanz where the mountain rose, rough, rocky and precipitous. Water-furrows glistened here and there, thin threads of silver amid the green. Herds of cattle, draught bullocks, milch cows, and tolies, wandered away beyond the fenced landes on the left, while up in the mountain flocks of goats and sheep browsed and slept and gambolled ; the very air was redolent with a sense of plenty and peace. On the right, as you crossed the drift, stood a large mill and granary, its lofts, even now, well full, and its floors busy with the labour of the boys shelling the maize cobs. From the great open door a road, well made and kept, led on the left front to the Trappist monastery of Nyalwa. A group of buildings of all types of architecture, a church of red brick, miniature and Gothic : the consistory also of the same type ; the dwelling house, a huge barn-like structure sub-divided into dormitories and recreation rooms, and a cluster of small mud huts, spotlessly clean, designed for the use and refreshment of visitors or such stray guests to the abbey as wandered that way ; the whole buried behind a fourfold avenue of black-wattle and gum-trees ; such was the home to which Franzel Maynehr had come.

His work, that of a lay brother, was for the main confined to tilling and cultivating the land, or bearing messages to neighbouring villages or more distant missions. So far, he had been happy, content, with never a restless thought. He liked his work and he loved the country with the unspoken poetry of its great distances, its golden warmth of veldt, its strange silences, the dreamy mysterious cadence of its whispering moods. He had looked forward to the day when all the valley from drift to mountain, from mountain to ridge, all round as far as the eye could see, would belong to the Fathers, to them. To-day as he worked on the eastern lands he was sad for the first time. Strangers had entered the Eden. A Dutchman and his daughter had come to settle, to farm in his beloved valley. It seemed to him very like deliberate theft, and in a slow burning way he resented it. As he stood there now, resting on his spade, with the

setting sun bathing his long fair hair to a deeper gold and burnishing the bronze tints of his smooth cheeks, he made a picture good to look upon. Over six feet he stood, his chest and arms bare, his face illumined, by the thought of the coming trespassers, to an expression which banished its usual mask of loutishness.

"Good evening, my friend! What beautiful landes."

The words fell from over the sod wall to his left, a clear musical riant voice. Maynehr turned swiftly, as if struck, then gasped and stood still, his hands by his side, his mouth slightly open, his breath coming hard. Was it a devil or an angel? She was so beautiful, so beautiful, he thought. He had not seen a woman for over seven years, none except Kaffirs. And now this apparition, seeming as it did to spring out of the ground, thrilled him with sudden fear. Certainly she was fair to look on, with beauty that seemed to thrill softly through his throat and chest and knees and make him weak where he stood. Her hair was unbound, flowing to her waist, a melting shifting mass of warm red lights and golden duskiness. Her throat was full and round and seemed quivering softly, almost insensibly as if with excess of vitality. Her face was oval, yet rather a round oval, rather heavy too in the jaw, but so softly moulded that it seemed to float out of her neck, a flower of laughter and mockery. It was almost dusky in its rich sunburnt bloom, but with all its darkness he could see the blood faintly flushing the delicate smooth skin. She was laughing at him. Her eyes half closed, were black as sloes, he thought, and yet in them there seemed something of irony, something of tenderness, something that irresistibly held his gaze. He noticed, as though he were far away from her, that her lips were full and looked very soft, full like rosebuds too early broken and over-blown. As he gazed she rested her face on her hands and leaning over the wall repeated her greeting.

"Where do you come from?" he gasped out, at last, drawing a step nearer.

"There," she said, pointing up to the sky, her eyes bubbling over with mischief, "or," she added solemnly, noting his profound stare, "there," pointing to the ground beneath her feet. Then a burst of laughter, ringing, unrestrained, and haunting; a flash of white among the thorn bushes, one note of music that seemed to breathe *au revoir*, and Franzel stood alone again, mopping his brow and lustily telling his beads. He was not accustomed to sensations. He felt that something had entered his heart and that everything in consequence was in the wrong place. Also he felt a wild, impetuous desire to see the vision again. But at that

moment the bell for the Angelus called him to the convent, and thither the habit of obedience impelled him. Nevertheless the devotions of Franzel Maynehr formed the subject of his confession and penance the next day, a penance which confined him to the immediate environs of the abbey and his cell, though why, Franzel hardly knew. He supposed that either the woman must be a kind of devil, or that all women are necessarily so, "probably the latter," he said to himself, "seeing that all the Fathers are so afraid of them."

III.

BERTHE VAN DOEM, the apparition, so startling to Franzel, was the daughter of the Dutchman whose arrival the lay brother had been lamenting. The old man, her father, had never got over his wife's death which happened when Berthe was but seven years old. Eight years had gone by since then, during which neglect had been followed by failing crops and stock, till now, with the remnants, he had left the old home beyond the Vaal to settle in the valley of the Trappists, as Nyalwa was known. Berthe was thus fifteen, though under the conditions governing maturity of form and development in an European country she might with reason have been taken for twenty-five. She had led the life customary to girls of her station, left under such conditions. Of her mother she had few memories, and these, such as they were, did not tend to add any softening influence to her life. A virulent tongue and a hard ready hand had been in Frau van Doem the exclusive medium of expressing maternal solicitude. Altogether Berthe looked back on the period since her mother's death as one of unalloyed joy in comparison to the unhappy era which had preceded her mother's burial. Left almost entirely to the care of the red Kaffir servants, she had grown up in an environment widely remote from those conventions and disciplines which are supposed to produce a civilised morality. At heart she was as utter and as happy a savage as ever trod the veldt. That her costume was European was due only to that innate love of garments which spurs the mere savage girl as the latest masculine type of *fin de siècle* femininity to the desire of a toilette that shall attract attention. It was the one attribute of civilisation that adhered to her.

Her whole being was instinct with an intense animal joy of life. To wander free and agile as a deer through bush and veldt, to breathe in the great glad laughter of the wind, to sit on the edge

of some deep black pool and watch her feet rippling the cool waters, or lying full length in the shadow of a kopje, gaze at the green, soft, alert-eyed lizards slipping silently from stone to stone, that was life to her. She drank it in, draining Nature's cup in each eager draught. Her speech, the lithe suppleness of her tireless limbs, the radiation of her presence, were as if electrified, bathed in a vital essence of glowing careless glorious life. Of education she had none, and her knowledge of God was but the echo of such dubious rumours as drifted through the prattle of mission Kaffirs, concerning one named Tiko. She was, literally, a waif of the veldt, reflecting its moods, its suggestion of latent passions, its possibilities of buried treasure, its terrible pulsating sense of struggle to express some answer to the dumb questionings that surged unread within its breast.

Her father had little place in her life. He was a small brownish fretful old man, not without some pretensions to dignity. During his wife's lifetime he had been rigidly excluded from all matters which concerned their child. He had thus grown to look on her as external to his life, and when Frau van Doem died, he was relieved and pleased to find that he was not expected to take any additional interest in his daughter. He had a snuffling sort of affection for her which found vent in an occasional caress during the short hours they passed together each day. For the rest, he was well content to let her grow up as she would, as carelessly happy in the present as she was happily careless of the future.

She had been convulsed with amusement at the consternation of the great, red-bearded Dane. Yet, too, it seemed to her that he was the goodliest man her eyes had ever seen. Lying under the tent of the waggon, gazing into the dreamy brilliance of the star-pearled night, she was conscious of new desires struggling through the mist of old feelings, desires which thrilled her and frightened her.

IV.

FATHER ANTHONY was exercised in his mind. He was an old man and for twenty years had been listening to the sins and weaknesses of the Trappist brothers, yet never in his experience had he been confronted with a difficulty such as this. Rumours had reached him that Franzel, Franzel whom they had always looked upon as too stupidly docile to be subject to serious temptation, had been seen again and yet again wandering about the hills and woods with a woman. Now, such a thing, apart from the danger of it, was a grave scandal, and the whole community

was fluttering in a state of suppressed excitement. The unruffled calm which had hitherto made meditation so delightful in the little monastery had given way to a disturbing atmosphere of dangerous speculation. Franzel was secretly regarded as a sinner, and yet, for the life of them, his comrades could not repress a certain spirit of envious, though fearful, veneration for his temerity. But the hero of their thought was meanwhile as serenely unconscious of the sensation he was causing as he was innocent of any knowledge of the terrible sin in which he was supposed to be living. His penance over, he had resumed his work on the outlying landes.

At Berthe's next visit, however, he had at first endeavoured to reject all her proffered advances. But there was something about her too irresistibly vitalizing to allow of such churlish reception long. Gradually he had drifted, under the sway of her presence, into a new and keen delight in her company. Often he would leave his work in the afternoons, and roam with her through the bush. His love for the Fathers and the habit of his life were as strong as ever in him. This new companionship, so full of sweet inscrutable pleasure, seemed to him as a zest, garlanding labour with fruits unknown before. When he awoke to the fact that the fruit was forbidden, the taste of it was strong enough to prompt the question "Why?" Not finding any convincing sense of guilt, he quietly shelved the whole problem, and abandoned himself to the enjoyment of his sensations without seeking to fathom them further. So their friendship had grown. Together they had rambled through every nook and corner of the valley; hand-in-hand climbing the slippery slopes of the hills; now lying in some woodland glade with the finks and paroquets chattering above their head, their gay plumage flashing from branch to branch; now wading through a rushing drift, Franzel bearing her like a child in his arms; now racing pell-mell down a mossy gorge, to sit silent and breathless above the gentle rippling of the stream beneath. The very bushbuck seemed to know them as comrades claiming kindred. Their conversation was that of all primitive developments the moment's desire, the ignorant dreaming, the merest incidents of their animal environment. Into Franzel's sluggish veins no fire of conscious passion crept. In his dormitory at night, in chapel, anywhere, indeed, apart from Berthe, he was conscious of a void, of an aching dominant spirit of restlessness and undefined yearning. But withal, he was still a lout, irresolute because incapable of knowing his own moods, of analysing his most palpable desires. He waited as heavy, sluggish natures always do wait, for some cue, some alien voice to express him-

self to his own consciousness. But Berthe, with feminine intuition had discovered herself and him without delay. Her whole being was in fierce revolt against her own impotence and his apathetic unconsciousness. "He was such a fool," she thought. "Why would he not see?" She laughed softly to herself as she thought how little opposition she would offer to his wooing. Suddenly there flashed across her a memory of a hut away upon the hills at the apex of the valley. She had seen it when they first came; the day she had gone with the Kaffir girls to cut the yellow reed-canies for the thatch. The bushman witch-doctor lived there, they had told her. Should she go to him? Go and obtain some love-spell wherewith to wake this fool of hers? Though without much faith in Kaffir spells, yet she was not wholly untouched by their superstitions. The idea, once presented, grew apace. She wrapped herself in a Kaffir blanket, and taking some money and a knife from the hut which served as a store crept past her father and fled away up the valley. The bushman was squatting at the door of his hut as she came up, mixing with water a red powder which he shook in tiny quantities from a small bladder. He was an old man, not so much wizened as frightfully creased and crinkled. A red film entirely blotted out one eye, and the other drooping slightly towards the outer corner gave him the appearance of continually attempting to look under his ear. His hair, twisted in screws, Kaffir fashion, was decorated with bladders. Round his neck was hung a string of teeth which appeared horribly human in shape and size. The skin on his chest and arms hung in flabby wrinkles, hard and seared. Round his waist was a girdle of hide sustaining a mutya,* made of the tails of wild cats, and at his side a collection of catskin bags dangled and swayed.

As Berthe came up, he laughed a dry, wheezy cackle, half derision, half satisfaction. "So the white woman, too, knows old Tobi's skill," he cackled, in a high shrill falsetto, "and would have that which will make a man's soul burn till his lips shall speak."

Berthe, aghast that he knew her errand, trembled and paled. At the sight the whole body of the bushman seemed to shrivel and shake with laughter like a dead leaf in the wind. "Ha, ha," he said, "you shall have your love, little white woman, you shall have your love. Give me the knife and the money. And see, put this—this red paste—upon your lips. And look you, there is no man on whose breast you shall lie and whose lips you kiss, that will not give you your desire." Berthe took the paste,

* Mutya is an apron.

fearfully and in silence, and turning was about to flee, when the bushman's voice, strident and shrieking, stayed her, spellbound to the spot. He had risen to his feet tottering and quivering as with palsy. His skinny hand pointed at her, till it touched her breast; his one eye protruding, glazed and set, his shrill scream seemed to cut into her very being. "Beware," he said, "beware, of a babe unborn. The mist is creeping up, up, up, and the fire will burn, and none shall know, none shall know, but he, who—who—" Then, with a shriek, he fell foaming and writhing to the ground. Berthe, terrified beyond speech or power of thought, turned and fled like a deer down the hill.

It was some hours before she recovered her equanimity. But soon with the light elasticity of young animal life, she banished the warning as the raving of a madman and revelled in the love potion and the visions of all it should effect. She would try that very day. They were to meet that afternoon at their favourite trysting place, the deep dell, hidden by a huge boulder. As Franzel had to climb this first and then pull her up, they deemed it inaccessible to the rare passer-by.

As fate willed, however, it was on this very afternoon that Father Anthony had resolved to bring conclusions to an issue with the young brother. He was a tall man with a venerable face and had a tender way with him in listening to the trials and temptations of others that gave him the reputation of being very gentle and lovable. But beneath this silky tenderness lay, as the brothers well knew, a spirit of discipline, so implacable in its exactions, so relentless in its severity that his penitents had learned to gauge the enormity of their offence by the degree of sympathetic gentleness in which Father Anthony welcomed the first steps of their return from the paths of misdemeanour. Walking up the glen two or three hundred yards behind the lay brother, on this particular afternoon, Father Anthony felt very tender indeed. His smile was so soft, his whole air so instinct with the delicate perfume of sympathy and anticipation, one, beholding, might have thought he was bent on expediting the bridal of some angelic beings in whom he was personally interested.

Franzel, happily unconscious of the holiness which was guarding him rearward, kept merrily on his way to the tryst. He seemed to himself more light-hearted than usual, and the beauty of the glen, familiar as it was, appealed to him, in a hundred new and irresistible ways. It seemed to thrill through him and welcome him as belonging to itself. He was enjoying, though he knew it not, the sweet and haunting irony of Nature's farewell. To

all minds, to all natures, such a moment comes, that inevitable hour when field and meadow, glen and glade, stream and sea, unfold and expand before our eyes, inspire us, inbreathe us and make us one for the moment with the full delicious joy of their life, in order that for ever afterwards we may gaze on them and measure the fathomless profundity of pain in the scale of that one hour.

The glen was certainly beautiful. It ran up the hill towards the western sky. At sunset you might see the whole length and breadth of it bathed in a warm glow of golden light and purple shadow. A little stream ran through it, tunnelling its way beneath rock and tree, laughing and dancing over its pebbly bed, creeping softly, slyly, round an overhanging bank to dash with light mocking laughter away over ledges of rock, burying itself in a shower of foam and light to prattle placidly and demurely among the swaying reeds beyond. It was all light and laughter, and with gentle cooing moods as though it would woo the very doves from their nests. The great boulders overhanging it were garmented with moss and maidenhair, fragrant and glistening. Thorn-tree, willow, and wattle grew along its banks, and spread away on either side to lose themselves among the giant yellow wood. In the evening you might lie behind some screen of frondage and watch the buck emerge, swift and silent from their covert, and come down to drink, their shy startled eyes soft and pensive beneath the leafy gloaming. Bright birds flitted from bough to bough, their plaintive calls breaking the isolation of the scene, yet investing it with an atmosphere as of joys harshly quenched. Half-way up, the stream narrowed between two meeting walls of cliff, and here, standing on a boulder reaching to within four or five feet of the top of the cliff, Berthe was awaiting her lover. She was radiant with anticipation and excitement. Her cheeks softly flushed, her eyes sparkling, her lips breathlessly parted and quivering, her softly curved throat pulsing tumultuously in the ardour and the fear of the abandonment her heart had determined, she seemed as she stood there a very nymph of the grove, irresistible and all-conquering. The sight of her took away even Father Anthony's breath for the moment, and his feeling of tenderness for Franzel was multiplied alarmingly. But, for the nonce, he discreetly withdrew into covert, and he inwardly congratulated himself on his perspicuity, and the direction of providence, in selecting that particular afternoon for his quest.

Meanwhile, Franzel had swung himself easily to the ledge overhanging the boulder, and drawing Berthe up after him,

the two disappeared behind the leafy screen of mimosa, which fringed the summit. It took Father Anthony, unaccustomed as he was to such exercise, some time to follow. When, finally, he sighted them, they had reached a deep hollow, shut in on all sides by bush and softly sloping banks. Here, seated on the cool dry grass, Berthe was gazing into the face of her lover, who lay sprawling in quite unconscious grace of strength by her side.

"Have your landes grown gold in the night, that your eyes shine so?" he asked her.

"Nay, not gold, more than gold. Guess." She laughed, leaning over him till her breath, warm and trembling, fanned his cheek.

"I know not," he replied, "perhaps your cow——"

"My cow!" she cried, angrily, drawing back. It was too much, though, even for her, wont as she was to his sluggish wit. She burst into a low ringing ripple of laughter and then bending over him again, whispered passionately, "Nay, but love, love, love!" Then, ere he could move, she was kissing his lips. He was transformed in an instant. It seemed to him afterwards that he had lived but for that moment. The dormant passion which had been smouldering in him for weeks rushed into a tempest of conscious life. He swung himself to his feet, her arms still about his neck, her body swaying against him. He was unconscious of all the world save that his arms were round her, that his lips sought hers, that her eyes shone deep into his. "My beloved!" he murmured, "my beloved! and I did not guess; but now, now it shall be ever thus."

"My son," said a voice at his side—a soft silken voice, full of sympathetic gentleness—"the bells call us for the Angelus. Come. Let us go."

With a startled cry of alarm Berthe slipped from his clasp, gazed one moment on that venerable face with its tender smile and steely eyes, then fled incontinently down the glen. Franzel turned and faced the monk. The passion and the light had died from his face, leaving an abashed sullen look of shame. The habit of seven years' obedience to spiritual direction was strong on him. He had been used to look on right and wrong as he was told, and the silent tenderness of the monk assured him that here was something very wrong indeed. For an instant he contemplated fleeing after Berthe, and a wild delicious vision of freedom swept before his gaze. But the good Father saw the purpose in his eyes and forestalled him. He took his arm in a thin, cold, loving way and drawing him gently along said, "My son, we shall be late. That was a very beautiful girl—

very beautiful—we will talk of her anon." And so lightly chatting, he led him to the monastery.

The concentration of the brothers on their devotions that night was phenomenal. They had seen the two enter arm in arm, and their forebodings for Franzel were only equalled in vagueness and intensity by their pervading curiosity to know all about it. But Father Anthony's steely eyes and gentle smile swept over and anon among them and they were fain to suppress any evidence of emotion, and wait till opportunity should occur to glean some grains of scandal from the delinquent himself. They were, however, doomed to disappointment. Franzel did not share the common dormitory that night, nor did he again appear in his usual place at the common table. In the western corner of the buildings were two huts reserved for the use of the confessor. To one of these, whose stout door was provided with outside bolts, Franzel was led immediately after vespers, nor did the monks ever see him again among them save in a far corner of the chapel during the obligatory services. Father Anthony was weaving around him the silken mesh of metaphysical asceticism. He was one of those brainful, tireless men which the Roman system so proficiently produces. Franzel was like a log in his hands. The fine essences of subtlety went by him as a mist goes by a dead gum tree, leaving him just as lifeless, just as devoid of sparkle. But the Father was tireless. His efforts grew more tender, more patient, more implacable every day. After a week in immurement and compulsory fasting, Franzel's sullen silence to all Father Anthony's questioning gave place to a querulous reiteration of "why":—Why was it wrong to love this woman?—What harm did it do?—Why should he not marry her and live as other men? He had served the monks well. Let them allow him to go." He was answered by the tenderest of ascetic sophistries, and another week of isolation and fasting. By the expiration of that time he had come to think that his soul had narrowly escaped damnation and that Berthe was a very subtle temptation, if not an immediate incarnation of the Evil One. The worst of it was that his desire for her was by no means diminished by this new revelation of her characteristics. In such plight he therefore clung to Father Anthony and threw himself unreservedly into his hands. The ecclesiastic had won. The penitent confessed as a sin the superimposed reflex of the priest's creative mind and was duly absolved. A week's vigil was to ensue preparatory to his entering into vows.

V.

FRANZEL, in that state of animal exhaustion and mental fatigue which so closely and yet so delusively resemble spiritual exaltation, entered on his vigil with an enthusiasm which deceived himself as completely as it did the confessor. In no dormant, sluggish animal natures is there room for more than one great idea. And the idea which first awakens the capacity of receptivity is apt to exclude the entry of all later comers, however fierce or antagonistic may be the episodes which intervene between the idea and its achievement. It is this fact which has made the peasant leaders of revolt possible and dangerous in all ages and countries. So it was with Franzel now. The desire of Berthe, awakening and startling all the rudeness of his nature to a breadth and grasp of which he had never before been aware, had become at its inception knit into his being and, insensibly to himself, dominated him still.

The wet season was drawing to a close and the nights were misty. Great clouds of white mist enveloped the valley and blotted out the monastery, so that going from one building to another you had to grope your way. On the fourth night of the vigil Franzel had returned from the chapel with Father Anthony exhausted and faint with fasting. On entering the hut he stood still, listening to the bolts shooting into their sockets on the outside. Then he turned and knelt before the stone crucifix. But even as he knelt he felt the arms of Berthe steal round his neck, and her voice murmuring very low seemed to reach him through a long distance. "Come, come," she was saying, "I have found a way. Look." But even as he heard the words a sound as of the bolts being drawn back outside floated into the room—there was a rustle and a scramble and the next moment Father Anthony was standing in the doorway, saying, "My son, to-night you will spend in the chapel. I will come for you in an hour." Then the sound of the bolts falling back again and he was alone! He started up and for the remainder of the hour he roamed like a caged beast up and down the little cell. Whether the vision was real or not he was quite helpless to decide. Again and again it seemed to him that she had actually been there. He felt her presence pervading each fibre of his being, thrilling him with a sense of passionate desire. Arguments, subtleties, vigils, all thought of them was swept away before the bursting torrent of his will to go to her. If she would only come again!

Franzel hated the memory of that night more than he ever learnt to hate anything. The awful solemn silence of it, the little red light before the altar, the white, ghostly gleaming of the silver which inlaid the doors of the tabernacle, the dark gloom of the side altars, and the rows of empty seats created an atmosphere that appalled him and thrilled him with a multitude of vague impalpable fears. He went to sleep at last, kneeling, from sheer fatigue. But his dreams were bad. He seemed to be running on and on for ever on great waves of mist, down and ever down to a great fire burning below him, a fire in which Berthe was standing with a terrible smile on her face and her hands beckoning and compelling him. When he woke the chapel seemed gloomier than ever and the white mist from without had crept in and swathed the altar and the lamp as with a winding sheet, seeming to raise a great barrier between it and him. And Berthe's face was ever floating before him—assuming all kinds of expressions, now tender and beseeching, now laughing in wild derisive merriment, now melancholy, and again so terribly distorted and agonised and full of hate that he fell forward shrieking, just as the door opened to admit Father Anthony who had come to confess him before the first Mass. In explanation of his cry he mumbled that he had seen a bad vision, that the devil had looked in his face. "Be comforted, my son," the confessor said to him, "the devil has done his worst for thee"—a pregnant speech he realised later. But the result for the nonce was the relaxation of the vigil; and Franzel retired to his cell.

The hour for luncheon came. The mist was still hanging about the valley and wrapping the monastery in an impenetrable cloud. As the last sounds of retreating footsteps vanished the bolts of Franzel's cell were slipped quietly back. He was lying on his mattress asleep. He opened his eyes as the grey mist-laden light streamed in, and there, in front of him, stood Berthe. With a low cry he sprang towards her, but she, evading his grasp, whispered hurriedly:

"Not now! Come, before they return." For an instant he hesitated and muttered:

"I dare not! I dare not!" But next moment she had twined her hands round his arm and was dragging him to the door. Her touch dissipated the terrible dreams of the night, and swiftly, silently he followed her. Once outside, she paused a moment, then, running back, bolted the door of the hut again. In another minute they were outside the buildings, wrapped from all view in the fog. For more than two hours they journeyed on,

not speaking, groping their way over stones and past the edges of great kraanzes. Berthe acted as guide, Franzel still holding her hand and at the same time greedily devouring the food she had brought him.

At last they reached the top of the mountain. The mist rolled in huge gray sinuous waves below them. Here and there out of the foam some giant tree spread its wan and spectral wealth of foliage. The silence was almost palpable. Before them lay a wide belt of bush land, dank and dropping with the moisture. At the edge of this Berthe stopped and searching carefully found a small, almost indiscernible, footpath. Pursuing this, they arrived in a short time at a small hut, empty, but containing both food and fire. Here she turned and, flinging out her hands to him, cried, with a strange note of exultant passion vibrating through her voice :

“Here we are safe, and for a while you may rest.”

The moonlight was struggling wanly through the dense cloud of branches overhead when the two resumed their journey.

“Tell me,” he asked her as they went along, “how it was you came to me.”

“Oh, that terrible man!” she cried ; “that terrible old man ! He came to me one day in the woods and told me I should go to hell if I saw you any more, and that you were dead to every one but Tiko, or God, or whatever you call him. But I ran away and told Tobi, old Tobi, the witch-doctor. And that day in the mist we climbed on the thatch and he let down a ladder of hide through the great chimney and I climbed down and waited for you. Then I had to flee. And I thought I had lost you. But Tobi said : ‘No ; you would have to come because I had kissed you.’ And I had watched them often and knew they all went in for food, and then Tobi said : ‘Why not open the door and walk out.’ I had been so afraid and miserable, I never thought of it before. But now you are free, and you will never, never go back, will you ?”

Then he took her in his arms and kissed her and swore he would never go back—never leave her. And she was comforted, and laughed, saying :

“If you do, I will come and bring you back again ; yes, even from my grave.”

The next few days they trekked by foot, sleeping in hollows and under overhanging rocks. They were perfectly, irresponsibly happy.

On the fourth day they came to a Kaffir wagon, outspanned on the veldt, on its way to Pondoland. With the driver of this they

bargained for a passage. Franzel was moneyless. But Berthe had begged all the money her father had possessed, and with this she was able to complete the bargain and save a little over. The two months of that journey transformed Franzel. Occasionally some dark and sickening doubts filtered into his brain as to the exact sin he had committed. But these moods beneath the spell of Berthe's radiant presence and unruffled joy were not of long duration. He grew more animate, more sentient.

They were, on their arrival in Pondoland, received with friendliness by the chief, who gave them permission to build a kraal when they would, and farm as much land as they liked, and even lent them a span of oxen and a plough to start operations on the pledge of one-tenth of the crop. They built their kraal beneath the height of the N'Tabankulu range, where the eastern slope descends softly to the swirling blue waters of the Umzimvulu. Here Franzel devoted to good use the agricultural training he had received at the Trappist monastery. He led water furrows down to his lands, extended his plough land farther and farther over the plain, and surrounded his kraal with trees transplanted from the great bush which covered the southern flank of the range. Berthe meanwhile soon became a favourite among the neighbouring kraals. Accustomed from infancy to their ways, she was as one of them in thought and sympathy, while her position and colour rendered her secure from envy and jealousy. So the months rolled on, and no cloud arose to darken the radiant horizon of their life.

VI.

HARVEST followed harvest till the seasons slipped into years. At the end of their fourth year Franzel was the possessor of many acres of grain land and a herd of about thirty head of cattle, purchased from the proceeds of his crops. The two of them were never tired of gazing at these cattle, comparing them, discussing their good and bad points. They had all the love and affection of a Kaffir for them. To loll at the door of the hut, as the sun was sinking over the black line of N'Tabankulu, to watch them lazily creeping homewards through the long grass, to hear the gentle lowing and the tinkle of the old cow's bell, that was their chief delight. With the return to active work Franzel had relapsed into something of his former sluggishness of thought. It seemed to him that he had all he wanted. What could be better, he thought, than to see his work grow each week, to find

the arms of the woman he loved still waiting for him on his return from the labour of the day, to have plenty to eat and drink, and to go to bed pleasantly tired each night. Certainly it would be nice had they had children, he sometimes thought; "but then," he would often say to Berthe, "we haven't, and we have our cattle." And he would smile in that slow, old, loutish manner which at times made Berthe long to hurt him—hurt him in some mortal way which would galvanize him to comprehension once and for all. For it was the absence of children which was gradually making Berthe's life unbearably miserable. More than once had she heard the Kaffir women laughing at her, calling her behind her back "the poor childless one!" Apart from the sting of such badinage the maternal instinct in her was assuming the shape of an absorbing passion. Her passionate adoration of her husband, strong though it was as ever, was yet only physical. There were times when she felt she nearly hated him, he was so slow, so dense of comprehending her needs and desires. She longed for some young thing of her own flesh and blood whose intuition should be at one with her own, whose love should be spontaneously at sympathy with her unspoken yearning. She had heard the men, too, asking Franzel why he did not take another wife from among them—a wife who would bear him children. The chief even had offered him his daughter; for Franzel had cattle and to spare for any lobola* they might ask. And though she had seen Franzel laugh at them and their offers and heard him say he was content, yet the thought of it roused in her a very fire of jealousy. Her thoughts found vent in fits of sullenness and peevish petulance, which for want of other object made Franzel their butt. On one occasion he had found her silently crying and rocking herself to and fro on the floor of the hut. When he elicited the fact that she wept for children she had not, he laughed with that great rude boisterous laughter he always accorded to what he considered an excellent joke. Dragging her up from the floor, he whirled her to the door and pointed up the hill, where the cattle were slowly coming homewards and said:

"Be comforted, sweetheart; there are fifty children." In her rage and misery she turned and struck him with all her might in the face, then fled into the hut and barred the door.

Under the stress of such circumstances Franzel began to feel that the level sequence of his days was changing for the worse. Though Berthe was as fervid in her self-reproaches and attempts

* Lobola is a dower paid in cattle.

at atonement as she was excitable in her petulance, Franzel none the less sighed for the return of that placid life which had been so smooth and easy before. He did not in the least understand this desire for children, and he missed, with a sense of grievance, the exact care for his creature comforts which had so punctually characterised the previous years. Altogether, he was inclined, in his slow way, to be angry with Berthe.

Coming home earlier than usual one hot afternoon he stopped outside the hut, mopping his wet face under the shade of the thatch. There were voices audible inside. He recognised the wheezing, wheedling tones of an old hag from a kraal some miles away, whose skill in midwifery made her a feared if not a favoured visitor. Suddenly her voice dropped: but the whispered words came to him through the open window distinct and clear.

"Look at Inali, she had no children for three, four, five years, then she left her husband's kraal till the moon rose on the ridge, and now she has borne him more children than any other of his wives. Take another husband so, daughter of my chief, and your children shall be many as the calves around your kraal. There is Maquam, for instance——"

Then Berthe's voice, hard, angry, and fierce, floated out to him. "Go," she said, "go, you vile wretch, and never dare to come to my kraal again! Go, or the dogs shall hunt you out!"

Then the old hag hobbled forth, brushing past Franzel as she went. She stopped a little way off and looked at him. Her face was all shrunken and shrivelled; her eyes were rheumy, her lips flabby and hanging down; her breasts fell in wrinkled folds on her skinny chest, like the empty cat-skin pouches the men carry with them. She pointed at him, and with a thin cracked laugh jeered: "She shall never bear thee children," and then hobbled, cursing, away over the veldt.

He found his wife in tears; but she refused any explanation with an outburst of pettishness that left him sullen and angry. He, therefore, said nothing to acquaint her with the fact that he had overheard what had passed. Why he kept silent he hardly knew. Perhaps it was merely the mute refuge of weakness wreaking resentment secretly. But the fact proved fatal to his peace of mind. How it grew he never could tell. But none the less surely day by day a slow suspicious jealousy of his wife's fidelity took silent root in his mind. He watched her furtively, and found sustenance to the cancerous growth in his brain in every mood, in every word she spoke. He would leave his work

in the landes and creep up to some kopje and lie there watching the house for hours, sometimes sneaking up to the hut and peering in at her. She saw his face one day looking in thus, dark, and furtively malignant in its expression. Her startled shriek of surprise was to him but another confirmation of his suspicions. The current of his thought, however, was turned into depths he could neither fathom nor analyse. Berthe recovered all at once her former spirits. Her listlessness gave way to a state of radiant excitement. She was singing, laughing and chatting all day. She had long and mysterious conversations with the old wives of the neighbouring kraals. She would pet and tease, and caress him as in the first days after their flight. He found it impossible to resist her advances, and gradually he slipped back into the old groove, his suspicions and jealousies lying dormant and unanswered within his breast.

VII.

It was the fifth year of their flight, in the month of March, on the very date they had fled that a baby was born. Berthe had breathed no word of its expected advent to her husband. In spite of herself she was haunted by the strange warning of the old bushman. When she woke one morning to the consciousness of the new life that thrilled within her, athwart her first great gush of joy, there flashed the memory of that warning and of the strange furtive look on her husband's face as it had peered through the window, watching her in the moonlight. Some vague instinctive feeling of finding safety in secrecy had sealed her lips. On the morning of the child's birth, Franzel had gone out earlier even than usual. The dun cow, his pet among the whole herd, had gone astray, and he might be away all day seeking it. He had noticed several of the old women hanging round the kraal as he left, but beyond wondering in a vague way what they wanted, he did not pause to ask. He had not been gone more than an hour when the child was born. In features and form it was as like any other European child as possible. But in colour it was black, an unmistakable, healthy Kaffir black. The old women performing the usual rites over it nodded together, laughing and whispering. They knew how it was. Oh yes, they knew. Had they not heard from Panda's wife's mother all about the visit, and the advice, and its reception. Well, they did not blame her, not they. It was the best thing

that could have happened. But what would baas Franzel say? So they whispered on. When at last they handed the child to its mother, she looked on it in a dazed alarmed kind of way for some seconds, holding it from her and scanning it as though she were suspicious of some trick they were playing on her. Then as through a mist she seemed to hear her mother's voice, strident and harsh, railing at her father with the words, "Get up and work, you lazy nigger, you! I don't know why I ever married you—black Kaffir that you are!" And still as through a mist she saw her father's face, it's sallow, grey look, his tight woolly curls, his long curved nails, his deep black eyes and thick lips. She had never realised it before. Now as it dawned upon her, she cared even less. It was her child; that was enough. Drawing the infant to her breast, she lay back on the rough mattress, a faint smile of happiness illuminating her face. As she sank into a slumber the old women drew the one blanket across her and stole outside the kraal. There they sat drinking beer, and eating mealie cakes and meat, and retailing such scandal as their prolific imagination and wide experience gave them cognizance of.

Meanwhile, however, Franzel was far away. He had found the spoor of his cow, and followed it along the northern edge of the cliff towards the valley occupied by the Amatongas. By noonday he had travelled many miles only to find that the spoor was lost and absorbed in that of some large herd. He therefore visited Dingan, the chief, and reported the loss. That worthy, always hospitable, promised a search on the morrow and its immediate return when found; meanwhile would not the umlungu* rest and eat. Nothing loth, Franzel readily assented; and it was not till late in the afternoon that he set out over the mountain for his home. He had to get off his horse and lead it during the descent from the ridge on the other side. He noticed, as he sat resting for a few minutes, that a white mist was creeping up from the bush far away on the right. But he knew from experience that it would not envelop the valley till the sun was well down. So he sat on, revelling in the prospect of his home, which lay there, so still and peaceful, nestling far below him. The soft red flush in the sky threw long purple shadows over the veldt. He could just distinguish the thatch of his kraal, and the thin faint column of smoke that rose curling into the air till it faded against the sky line. He could see the cattle, too, a big, black, slow-moving blotch in the distance. He knew exactly the order in which they would enter the kraal. He

* "Umlungu"—a white man.

counted them, in thought; there would be the big black ox with the white face and pendant horn, leading the way, and then the fat, ugly red brute that horned him the other day. He would kill that the next beer drink, he thought. One by one he tallied them off as they would go in, recounting their history and adventures to himself as he did so, smiling the while with a childish delight in their possession.

The whole scene was very fair before him. The faint wavy gold of the tops of the corn and mealies was just visible against the thin silver thread of the river a thousand yards below. On either side the mountain sank away, losing itself in mist on the right, slanting into a great wash of golden light on the left, where the sun's last rays came streaming through. Far away beyond the river stretched the veldt, with all its varying colour and shadow. Range after range of hills, rising one behind the other in shadowy array, led the sight by gradual degrees to the pale opal lakes of sky which looked a limitless number of miles away. Here and there huge kopjes, broken and stony, threw weird shadows across the veldt, lengthening each moment into shapes monstrously grotesque. He gazed as if fascinated on it all. Then suddenly a breath of the coming mist caught him. He shivered and his mood changed. He felt strangely cold, and chilled, and miserable, as though some icy hand of fate had touched him on the shoulder and claimed the coming hours. He rose and made his way rapidly down the hill. The last half hour of his journey he had to trust to the instinct of his horse. The mist had risen quickly, and blotted out the whole landscape. He was cold and drenched when he arrived at last at the hut. The women had long ago departed, leaving the mother and child placidly sleeping. There was no one to welcome him, and he felt an inexplicable feeling of disappointment and hesitation which kept him for some minutes standing outside the door of his home. At last he flung back the door and entered. The noise awoke Berthe, whose start elicited a fretful whine from the child.

Franzel stood and stared at her and the child at her breast. What on earth possessed her to be lying there with a Kaffir's child at her bosom? He could not realise. At last, pointing at the baby, he said, in his slowest most deliberate way, "What—is—that—thing?"

"It is my baby," she said, looking down at it with an expression in which nothing save infinite pride and joy were manifest.

"Your what?" he said, in a dazed, dumb kind of way, his voice seeming to himself to come from somewhere quite external to him.

"Our baby," she replied, without looking up, so that she never noticed the expression on his face. "My baby and yours. Our baby, dear," she prattled on. "I have known it, oh, for a long time. But I would never say anything, no, not a word even. I wanted it to be quite a surprise for you. And now, dear, you can keep all the cows, for I have got my baby. And you know, dear, it is only black because my father was a Kaffir. Perhaps it will grow up white. Do you think it will? Come and look at him."

There was no answer, and she looked up to find Franzel gone. He had stepped back and vanished in the mist before she had half finished speaking. A sullen and terrible fury took possession of him. So this was the end. His suspicions had been true, after all, and she had deceived him. He groped his way to the cattle kraal, and leaning against the fencing, fell into short gasping sobs of dazed, impotent rage. He was torn between love and hate, between desire and murder. Why should he not kill her—strangle the lies in her round white throat? But even at the thought of it, the passion of the past years caught him and tossed him in the torrent of desire, and he hungered for her and would fain have strained her to him and kissed her. Then the vision of that "thing" she held crept in between them, and he dug his nails into the hard flesh of his palms and raved as one mad. Again and again he started towards the house impelled by the dominant passion of the moment. But again and again he turned back groaning to go cursing over the same ground again, till his brain reeled and he staggered about like a drunken man. Then suddenly he grew quite calm. It seemed as though a voice had whispered quite distinctly and aloud in his ear, "Why not kill the child?" There was no doubt that was the only solution of the difficulty. He wondered it had not at once occurred to him. It would punish the woman. Yet he would still possess her. And for the future, well, he would see that it did not occur again.

He crept back stealthily and entered the hut. Berthe looked up, her face aglow with joy. She had been cooing and talking to her babe, weaving around it all the glamour of motherhood's marvellous tenderness. But her smile, at the sight of her husband, was frozen on her lips. In his face was the same under-band but malignant look that had so terrified her before. She

shrieked aloud in her fear and hugged the child to her breast, close, protectingly.

"Why do you cry out," he said, in a low voice, wheedling and soft and strangely unlike his own. "Give me the child and let me look at him."

"No, no, no!" she wailed, more and more terrified at his manner and the wheedling sound of his voice.

"Give me the child, I say," he insisted, savagely, and sprang towards her.

But she, weak though she was, was too quick for him. With the thought of danger to her child, her courage came back in a great rushing wave. She sprang from her bed, her blanket falling from her. Then half naked, the child pressed with one arm to her breast, she faced him, the other arm outstretched, warding off his approach. He stood there glowering at her. Then the furtive look crept again into his eyes, the look that frightened her more than all his spoken wrath. It was so incarnate with lies that masked a fell purpose. He began wheedling her again. She continued facing him and edged slowly towards the door. She thought he was mad. If she could only reach the door and dart out before him into the mist. But suddenly he divined her purpose and with a snarl had flung himself on the door, shut it and barred it. The memory of old Tobi's words came back to her. She turned sick and faint and leant against the wall for support. She saw him creeping closer and closer to her, but she was helpless and as if fascinated. Then she felt his hands, hot and sticky on her throat, and his breath like the hot noisome wind of the marshes panting over her face and breast, and his voice wheedling and sounding far away repeating again and again, "Give me the child." The words broke the spell. In a very frenzy of fear she struck him with her disengaged hand again and again in the face, and wrenching herself partly free endeavoured to slide from his grasp. She slipped in the attempt and her foot catching in his she fell heavily to the bed, the child under her.

The light from the fire had flickered down. The gloom of the hut was ghostly, swathed in the gray moisture of the mist that had stolen in while the door was open. But by the faint light Franzel could just see her face turned towards him, full of unutterable terror and loathing. He had fallen with her, his hands still grasping her throat. In the fall his grip had tightened; but he did not know it. He knelt there muttering, "Give me the child, give me the child." Then slowly he became conscious

that all resistance had ceased. He gave the logs on the fire a kick with his foot, and as the flames flared out he cast a terrified glance at his wife, then with a scream started back. She was lying with her face in the glow of the firelight, dead, strangled! It was the face of his vision in the chapel. He realized it with a slow horror. The same terrible, defiant, distorted smile on the lips from which a thin line of crimson slowly trickled—the same awful look of hate and menace in the eyes. He flung himself beside her and wildly chafed her hands and face, sobbing aloud and calling her name. Then in a paroxysm of fear he took her by the shoulders and shook her, cursing himself the while. But no answer came. The full horror of it all came rushing on him, and he fell forward swooning over her body. When he awoke the fire was nearly out. His brain seemed quite cold and calm. His one dominant sensation was that he must hide the crime and flee. He pulled the bed into the centre of the room and set fire to it, then taking a burning ember he went round the hut inside and fired the thatch, blowing at the ember to make a flame. Then he went out shutting the door to after him. He took down the poles of the cattle kraal and went in and out among the cattle, bidding them in a dumb, numbed sort of way a last farewell. By the time he had finished, his hut was enveloped in flame. He stood at the gate of the kraal watching it, and in a dull, leaden manner tried to make himself believe he was justified and that at any rate it was an accident.

At last, with a great shower of sparks, the roof fell in, blazing furiously.

Suddenly, from the gloom of the mist, he saw a man emerge on horseback, and ride straight up to where he stood in the full glare of the blaze. He was a little, wizened, old man, with white hair, which grew in tight curls. His skin was yellow and creased like a Kaffir's, and his hands were skinny and long, with bent fingers and hooked nails. He came up and asked him if his name were not Franzel Maynehr.

"Yes," Franzel stolidly answered, "that is my name. What do you want here?" He could see the man was a half-caste, and he felt that he hated and cursed all Kaffirs or men of Kaffir blood.

"I want to see my daughter," was the stranger's reply. "How did your hut take fire?" he continued.

"Your what?" said Franzel, a sickening suspicion of the truth dawning on his mind.

"My daughter! I am Van der Doem, her father."

To his consternation the old man felt himself grasped roughly by the shoulder, and a voice hoarse with anguish rang in his ear :—

“Your mother! What was your mother?”

“My mother was a Kaffir, sir,” the old man said, drawing himself up, not without an air of dignity.

“A Kaffir! Accursed! Accursed! Accursed!” The cry wailed out into the night, vibrating with the terror and the torment of a soul that knows itself damned. Next minute the old man was alone. Franzel had fled into the mist, up the hill.

In the morning they found the charred bones of Berthe, and a small cindery heap beneath her which might have been the body of her child. Strange rumours grew apace as to the disappearance of Franzel; but none there had seen him on that night; no trace of him was found about the neighbourhood; and both his crops and his cattle were very good, too good to want ownership long, or wait a search for a lost master.

Meanwhile, Franzel had fled on and on, blindly, unconsciously. It was not so much remorse that lashed him on, though he felt all the sickening, shuddering horror of his crime and its monstrous futility to the full of his capability. It was rather a panic-stricken terror of the vague feeling that was in him, of a compelling fate whose initiation he must fulfil in effort. It had been so useless—so horribly, dreadfully unnecessary. Whither he was fleeing he did not know. Day after day he sought covert in the woods. Night after night he trekked through rivers, through streams, over mountains and kopjes and kraanzes, stumbling on incoherently. During the day he slept—a dreamless, leaden weight of sleep, that left him at night feeling beaten, numbed, and more and more purposeless.

At the end of nearly a month of this life, he found himself one April morning outside the monastery of the Trappists. Unconsciously, as if impelled by some instinctive sense, he had come in a straight line across country to the old haven of refuge. As he stood there, slowly realising this, Father Anthony passed him, and, gazing curiously at him, paused as if to speak, but then pursued his way to his cell. He wondered who the strange figure could be. Little wonder was it that Franzel was not recognised. His hair hung matted about his face, white, dirty, mud-stained. His clothes were in rags; his hands, and legs, and arms, and face, were bleeding and torn by thorns. His eyes were glazed and vacuous, like the eyes of a drunken boy. He

crept in after Father Anthony and, falling at his feet, moaned in a low whimpering way, infinitely distressing. It was some time before the confessor recognised his quondam penitent. He had been bitterly angry at the flight. It was such a blow to his system and his prestige, and often he had prophesied the vengeance of Heaven on the delinquents. But that this whimpering wreck should be Franzel shocked him inexpressibly. Bit by bit the tale stood revealed in all the ghastly detail of its horror.

If Father Anthony had been shocked by the appearance of the man, he was more than shocked by the reality. He was profoundly moved. His sympathy took immediate and practical form. He forced the wretched man to eat and drink, compelled him to bathe, and superintended the process, sent for the little brother Thomas to shave his head, and personally saw him to bed after making him swallow a draught of opium. But what to do afterwards he could not, for the life of him, think. He wandered out, his head bowed, his hands folded in prayer, his feet unconsciously pursuing the way that led to the glen. As he reached the spot where he had first seen Berthe, and contrasted the look of her that day with the terrible sequel just confided to him, he groaned aloud. For the first time in his life he asked himself the question: "Could he have been wrong? Was he responsible for the results, in any remote way?" But he put this thought aside, saying to himself that this pain, that seemed at first sight so terrible, so ghastly in its error, so unnecessary and inconsequent, had, after all, its prophylactic uses. It was Nature's judgment voicing Nature's law—and for the rest, as the deed was not premeditated, and partook to a certain extent of the nature of an accident, he would keep Franzel in seclusion at the monastery. He must live a life of penance, and try to purge his soul. It was with an easier mind that he returned to his patient.

But the days passed, and Franzel proved inflexible to all the efforts of the monk to rouse him. He was plunged in a deadly apathy, and would sit for hours in the hut, his hands on his knees, staring at the floor, silent and brooding. One morning he was sitting thus, apparently listening to, but not hearing, the Father's gentle talk, when suddenly he sprang up, his face flushed and distorted with intense excitement.

"Look!" he cried, his voice ringing strong and full of fear. "Look! She said she would come! She is there, there, beckoning!"

Then, with a great cry, he rushed past the monk's feeble, restraining hands, and sped like a stag up the hill. They never saw him again at the monastery, nor did ever any one hear of him again. Only the old Kaffirs will tell you that when the mist rolls over the black ridges of the N'Tabankulu you may see in it a woman, with her hair floating about her, walking backwards, beckoning to a man of huge stature, who flees ever after her, but never overtakes her.

The Keys of Duma.

THE November dusk had closed round the wooded promontory that hung out its little inn like a lantern over the sea, ruddy firelight glowing from the deep-set windows and open door. One could almost drop a stone from the porch into the waves below, so steep was the narrow path that led down to the beach, where now the water rippled on the shingle in faint tinkling rushes. Behind the inn rose tree-crowned heights, dark against the violet-blue of the sky. Some few hundred yards away were cottages and an old mansion; but their lights were not visible through the woodland gloom. To-night a thin haze floated in the air and over the face of the waters, so that the sea was a level of glimmering grey and the stars were dim. In the south-west a crescent moon hung low, of the colour of a live ember. The night was windless and very still—so still that the murmur of the wavelets on the beach was scarcely audible in the porch of the inn; and the voices of those within seemed to ring too loudly for the whispering ghostliness of the world without.

There were five persons sitting in the common living-room of the little hostelry; the landlord and his wife, a tall, fair, silent woman; the landlord's brother; and their grandfather, an old seaman who sat in the chimney corner. Leaning forward, his hands clasped on his stick, he listened attentively to a young boy, evidently of higher rank, who was reading aloud out of a thick volume poised on his knees. Here was one of those quaint friendships that sometimes spring up between young and old of different station in remote country districts. The sailor spun endless yarns in the lad's wide-open ears, and he in return brought marvellous lore out of his father's library. The hour before the home dinner usually saw the boy either in the inn porch or by its fireside, with some ancient story or weird legend to which the old man hearkened with evident pleasure and unquestioning belief.

This evening the audience listened to Rabbinical tradition.

“‘And the Angel Duma,’” continued the clear child-tones,

“‘ who was once a god in Egypt and is now the supreme gaoler of Hell, has three keys, with which he opens the three doors on each Sabbath and at the new moon ; for at these times the damned have respite from their torments and are free for a little space.’”

“ Ay—ay, Master John,” said the old man as the boy paused, “ yon’s a rare book. That’s summat to think on. Ay,”—more slowly—“ that’s summat to think on.”

“ Well,” observed the landlord, “ o’ course them stories is interesting enow, an’ Master John’s a rare hond at rolling ‘em out ; but tha knows they’re nobbut fairy-tales.”

His grandfather struck his stick sharply on the floor.

“ Fairy-tales !—tha’s never been further nor Blackpool ! What dost tha know o’ th’ strange things i’ th’ world an’ out on’t ? I wur i’ th’ *Volage* i’ ‘39, an’ at Acre i’ ‘40 ; I ha’ sailed th’ seas round, an’ I ha’ seen enow o’ what tha calls fairy-tales fur to mak’ thy hair stand on end fur loife ! Ay, I have ! Dost tha think th’ damned ne’er coom back ? When I doubled Agulhas i’ ‘49, we did it wi’ decks awash an’ masts gone ; an’ we passed a big ship wi’ a smother o’ canvas, going easy as a duck, an’ her captain pacing th’ poop deck. Ay, I mind him well, a tall man, wi’ his beard blowing o’er his shoulder ; Vanderdecken he wur, an’ yon ship wur th’ Dutchman sure enow. After sighting her, we had fire break out aboard, an’ when we’d got it under, our captain died ; an’—”

He stopped, for at that moment a stranger entered, pausing an instant in the doorway ; a tall, powerful man, with that lithe swing which marks the sailor. Apparently he was about fifty years of age, grizzled of hair and beard, his features aquiline, his eyes black and piercing, his bearing imperious. He wore a long dark cloak, a short coat with a belt round the waist, knee breeches, stockings and buckled shoes, and a fur cap which he removed and placed on the table.

The landlord set a chair for the new-comer, and the woman rose and asked him what he desired.

“ I come for a brief rest upon quiet earth, mistress. I am weary of the toss and sound of the sea. But I will take whatever the house provides.”

Weary of the sea ! Yet truly his voice was of the sea, deep, strong, rhythmic, melodious ; with that magnetic quality which either attracts or repels ; to it none could remain indifferent.

“ Well, sir,” said the landlord, “ I’ve some rare owd brandy. I dunnot bring it out often, fur most folks conna tell owt from nowt. But if so be as yo’ like to try it ? ”

“ Yes.”

The brandy was brought, in a stone jar dusky with cobwebs, which the landlord wiped off with pride as denoting the value of the liquor ; and his wife took out of a cupboard in the wall a tall glass of curious shape and colour.

“ Surely this came from Holland ! ” remarked the stranger, turning the glass round.

“ Maybe, sir,” she replied, “ for it has been i’ my family many a year, an’ I’ve heard it came fro’ foreign parts.”

And lighting another candle in honour of the guest, she resumed her seat by the fire.

The atmosphere of the inn sensibly changed with the stranger’s advent ; it became charged with electricity as it were. This man dominated it. The boy had forgotten his book ; he and the old seaman both sat fixedly regarding the Unknown—the boy’s gaze eager, admiring ; the old man’s reflective, puzzled—as though he were recalling the long, long procession of faces that had passed through his life. Was this among them ?

“ The land has peace for her dowry,” said the guest, leaning back in his chair. “ Are not earth and air friendly elements to man ? —fire and water treacherous ? Is not a man’s sleep sweeter on the earth’s brown breast than on the restless bosom of the deep ? And is it not better to lie at last under the grasses than to be one of the many whom

‘ the sounding seas
Wash far away
Where they perhaps under the whelming tide,
Visit the bottom of the monstrous world ! ? ’ ”

The wonderful voice ceased, and the listeners drew a long sighing breath as men freed from a spell, murmuring slowly “ Ay, ay ; ” and because their blood was Norse, the words swept into their minds a vision of the dead men swinging for ever to and fro “ under the whelming tide,” among the wrecks, the waving weeds, the uncouth grotesque forms in the green twilight of the ocean depths. But the woman, sitting with her hands loosely clasped in her lap, thought neither of land nor sea, of death nor life, only of the man who spoke ; for it seemed to her that hitherto she had not dreamed such a one existed in these latter days. The aged seaman still kept his puzzled gaze ; the boy’s eyes brightened. He knew those mighty lines, and to hear them so spoken in those marvellous tones fanned the flame of his spirit, for the lad had the soul of a poet.

The stranger noted the glance and his stern features softened ; he could not be said to smile.

"So," said he, "you know your English poet? That is well." The boy flushed with pleasure.

"My father has lots of books," he responded eagerly. "I read them all."

"Ah, I see. Your nation is fortunate in its literature. I have several English books in my cabin."

"Are you not English, sir?" inquired the woman.

"No, I and my ship alike belong to the Batavian Republic."

At these words, a flash of scared recognition shone in the old seaman's eyes and he fell to muttering a prayer. The boy was perplexed; he would have understood had the stranger said he was Dutch, but where was the Batavian Republic? Was it some country very far away? Or—and the boy's eyes grew bigger—was it another name for Valhalla or Avalon?

Then the guest spoke of many things, the simple-seeming familiar miracles of life, the swing of the long centuries under the stars; and his listeners—unlettered, uncultured—seemed, with the witchery of that voice, to hear, to see those centuries, those mighty waves of life breaking in turmoil of war, pestilence, and famine upon the shores of the undiscovered country. And presently, as the rich cadences of the voice rose and fell, swaying the hearers as the wind blows the spray, they too waxed eloquent, casting off their habitual dulness and grossness of mind; and talked of curious happenings, beliefs, stories that had come down to them like broken shells left by those vanished waves—empty, dimmed in colour; yet real, bearing witness of life that had been. Only the old seaman sat silent, motionless, with a look on his face as of one who sees a vision.

At length the stranger rose.

"I must be gone," he said. "The coins I carry are foreign, but this will pay for my entertainment."

He drew a string of pearls from the breast of his coat and dropped the white jewels on the table, where they lay glistening among the pewter pots, the tobacco pouches, and rough blue plates. Then, with a courteous gesture of farewell to the pale woman sitting by the hearth, the Unknown passed out.

With his departure the spell seemed to break, the glamour of the last hour to vanish. Not wholly however, for the eyes of the woman and the old seaman turned to that open door as in a dream, and the boy, as though drawn by a magnet, softly stole out into the dusk.

The landlord took up the pearls.

"Are they good, granfeyther?" he asked, holding them out to

the old man, who by reason of having been round the world, was regarded as an authority on such matters.

"Ay—ay," looking at, but not touching the shining coil, "dost tha think *he* carries gimcracks? Yon string'll be worth a couple o' hundred pound—happen a trifle more."

The evil glitter of greed flashed into the eyes of both men; into the woman's face came a wistful expression; she would not have wished to sell, she would have worn the pretty things.

"Give 'em to th' parson fur th' church, or they'll bring thee ill-luck," the old man went on. "Nowt that's been aboard th' Dutchman can bring owt but ill-luck."

"Nay, granfeyther," softly interposed the woman, "th' gentleman meant kindly."

"Them owd yarns have moithered thee, granfeyther," said the younger man with a laugh. "Tha thinks him th' Flying Dutchman as was cursed? Nowt o' th' soart. He's a rich foreign chap that's going about to please hissen. An' folks dunnot believe them owd tales nowadays."

"That dunnot alter th' truth on 'em," responded the old seaman. "As I wur saying th' minute afore he coom in, I saw Vanderdecken i' '49, an'"—solemnly—"I've seen him now. Lord ha' mercy on us!—I've seen him now!"

The landlord was not listening. He sat turning the string of pearls over and over in his hand.

"Two hundred pound isna bad," he said. "I'll give up this here place an' take a beerhouse i' Liverpool."

"Dunnot do that, Joe," cried his wife, "I couldna breathe i' th' smother o' town."

"Thee might go halves, Joe," suggested his brother, his eyes fixed on the pearls.

"Fu why? I reckon I'm th' landlord here, an' this wur payment fur th' landlord."

"Fur a glass o' brandy an' water as wurna worth more'n a shilling!" retorted the fisherman angrily. "Nobbut fifty pound 'ud buy me a share i' a better boat. It 'ud be a new fit-out fur me."

"Thee con fit out thysen," replied Joe, still turning the jewels about in his fingers.

"Ay, theer's th' curse a-working already," muttered his grandfather, getting up. "Hankering after muck an' grime o' town, an' quarrelling!" And he hobbled out into the night.

Meanwhile the giver of the pearls had descended to the narrow beach, where he stood gazing over the sea, the water lapping at his feet, and the boy standing beside him. The new moon was

sinking fast; a few minutes more and it would pass to the underworld. A gentle air blew from westward, stirring the haze into folds and wreathing coils, but not enough to blow it away; and between shore and sea-line loomed a large ship, of a fashion never seen now save in old prints. She lay on the misty water like the pallid shadow of a monstrous albatross, her press of canvas forming the uplifted wings. Beyond her, the sickle moon shone like that reddened sickle of the Reaper-Angel gathering the vine of the earth,—a glow that was the sole point of colour in the grey night. There came to the ear the soft splash of oars, and the stranger turned his eyes from the vessel, looking down at the small figure beside him; whereupon the boy took courage and spoke.

“Are you Ogier the Dane?” he asked.

“No, I am not.”

“Perhaps,” hesitatingly, “you are the Wandering Jew?”

“No. I am one of the world’s wanderers, but not that one.”

“One of the world’s wanderers!” The thought flashed into the boy’s mind that there were only two—the wanderer on land, the Jew; the wanderer on the sea, the Dutchman.

“Oh, then you are Captain Vanderdecken!” with a thrill in the childish voice. “Is that your ship?”

“Yes.”

A boat grated on the shingle, square of shape, rowed by four men muffled in dark clothes.

“Will you come again?”

“I think not.”

“Not ever?”

“I cannot tell. I leave you nothing but the memory of me, for my gifts bring as little peace as I myself possess.”

The stranger paused, and glanced up at the lights of the inn, whence the sound of angry voices floated down in the stillness. He looked again at the boy’s wistful face.

“Restraint,” he said, “is the string of the pearls. Farewell.”

He stepped into the boat and the silent muffled figures pushed off, boat and crew swiftly receding into the mist, the splash of the oars becoming fainter, fainter—the boy gazing after the vanishing craft with all his soul in his eyes.

“Ay, yon’s th’ Dutchman!” said the old seaman in his ear, and the child started; so absorbed had he been in watching the disappearing boat that he had not noticed the old man’s approach.

“Yon’s th’ ship I saw off th’ Agulhas Bank i’ ‘49. Mark her now, theer’s none like her sailing th’ seas.”

"Then he was Vanderdecken!" drawing a long breath. "I thought so."

"Ay, to be sure! Who else? Vanderdecken he wur. Dost tha mind what wur i' th' owd book tha wur reading, Master John? 'Th' damned ha' respite at th' new moon.' An' theer's th' new moon, an' theer's th' ship the same as I last saw off th' Agulhas fifty year agone; an' her commander th' same—fifty year agone!"

There was a change in the shape of the vast shadow.

"See theer!" the old man went on. "She's shifted her helm, an'— Ay, she's heading fur th' open sea."

"I am glad I've seen him!"

"Dunnot say that, Master John. 'Tis bad luck."

The sound of the angry voices in the inn grew louder.

"Granfeyther!" cried the woman from the door, "come an' quiet 'em!"

"Ay—ay." The old man turned and hobbled up the path, muttering, "I know'd theer'd be trouble wi' them pearls. *His* pearls!—Vanderdecken's pearls! Th' Lord ha' mercy upon us!"

Suddenly the landlord and his brother appeared in the doorway, dark against the firelight, fighting for the jewels. The white string, held aloft, gleamed for an instant in the landlord's hand; then, snatched at by the other, broke and fell like a shower of frozen snow; and the two men, stumbling on the threshold, slipped and rolled down the path, knocking down the old seaman in their fall.

The crash of the three at his feet startled the boy out of his entranced gazing after the fast-vanishing ship.

"What is it?" he cried. "Oh, you have killed him!" kneeling and trying to raise the old man's head.

"I didna know he wur theer!" said the landlord in a scared tone.

"Nor I neither," echoed his brother in the same tone; the fall had driven the strife devil out of both.

The woman ran down the path, breathless and frightened.

"Oh, Master John—Master John!" she gasped, appealing instinctively to the lad whose forbears had led hers to battle long ago, and the boy responded as instinctively.

"I will fetch my father," he said. "And the doctor too. He is dining at our house to-night, he'll be there now," and the child sped away into the gloom.

While his vainly-repentant grandsons slowly carried the old man up to the inn, the woman, following them, turned and looked seaward. There, due south, was the faint vaporous blur of the

ship, which, even as she looked, melted into the haze ; the Dutchman was gone. Neither birth nor training had been such as to give the landlord's wife clearness of thought ; ideas floated confusedly through her mind. But the imaginative northern spirit was stirring in her, and she paused on the threshold with a vague questioning wonder. Which was the greater reality ? Yonder misty night of grey and silver and dim blue gloom, the dull red crescent moon that even now sank below the sea, the strange ship and her strange captain ? Were these the reality ?—and was the inn, with her husband and his brother, and the motionless form of the old man, all a dream ? Was everything a dream ? Something glistened at her feet. She glanced down and saw the trampled pearls scattered on the stone like May petals, not one unbroken ; and the torn thread of yellow silk lying in a tangled knot among them. Kneeling, she swept the ruined gems with her hand into a blue delft saucer.

“They're noan good now, lass,” said her husband hoarsely, “let th' cursed things be.”

But the woman put the saucer away among her few poor treasures.

The summoned aid came quickly, yet too late. But was it ill-luck that had so swiftly ended the old seaman's long voyage ? Surely he had touched the port called Fair Havens. And all that remained of the stranger's visit was an empty chair, a broken thread of yellow silk, a few lustrous white fragments as of soft shells beaten by the sea.

C. L. ANTRIM.

The Supernatural in India.

I.—IN REFERENCE TO SPORT.

THE natives of India have a firm belief in the supernatural, and, if we take that term as applying to occurrences inexplicable by any natural law with which we are at present acquainted, it may be granted that they have a wider range for startling experiences than we, hampered by the civilisation of the West, can ever hope for. It is, however, with the supernatural as we understand it that this article deals, for in India the ignorant villager often accepts as a matter of course occurrences marvellous enough in our eyes ; whilst those individuals who by self-abnegation have, at least in their own belief, attained to powers denied to the majority, consider their special gifts to be the reasonable result of the triumph of the spirit over the flesh.

It had been my fate to wander for many years in the jungles and waste places of Northern India where also the "fakir," or religious mendicant resorts to avoid the temptations of the world, and perhaps to pass years in silent introspection. My life was spent in carrying out the duties of a forest officer, and in hunting big game ; his in the mortification of the flesh with a view to rising to a higher plane of existence, and I confess to a feeling of sympathy and respect for one who, unarmed and alone, could complacently camp out in forests infested with wild beasts, trusting to his divinities for his life and to the rare passer-by for his subsistence. I had long known that some of these wanderers claimed the power of calling to a given spot any of the denizens of the jungle, but I had never put their powers to the test, for they invariably insisted on extorting a promise that the animal should not suffer for its obedience. I then considered that to see and not to kill would be intolerable to a keen sportsman, but age and experience have altered my views, and I regret my lost opportunities.

It was, however, my good fortune in the month of April some fifteen years ago to meet with an individual who undoubtedly

possessed a certain power over the wild animals in his vicinity, and who did not scruple to use it to his own profit. I cannot say how this power was acquired, though I doubt if it was the result of self-mortification, and incline rather to the firm belief of the neighbouring villagers, who attributed it to witchcraft. I had organised a small shooting party into Nepal in that year; my only companion was my friend B., a good sportsman but a hasty shot; whilst our outfit consisted of two howdah and four smaller elephants to form the line of beaters. With such a small party we did not expect much sport in that land of swamp and forest; we anticipated a week's tour in a new country with a little shooting to enliven the marches; and crossing the border we encamped near a village about eight miles in Nepal. My orderlies visited the village and returned with the usual news that the villagers knew of no tigers in the vicinity; they added, however, that they had discovered an old man who made his living by selling charms to protect the cattle against any tiger they might chance to meet in their pasture grounds. The two statements did not agree, but I knew that the villagers would give no information as to the whereabouts of a tiger, because, in the first place, they believed that the tiger would learn their treachery, and make matters extremely disagreeable in the future; whilst, secondly, they did not desire any strangers to camp near their village.

When we remember that there still exists a belief in the transmigration of souls, and that the body of a tiger frequently envelops the spirit of a bold bad man of the past, the sentiments of the unsophisticated peasantry may be more readily understood. The charm vendor, however, readily appeared when sent for, and proved to be a wizened, emaciated, feeble old person who made no promises save that he would join the hunt on the morrow, and asked for nothing but a goat and a bottle of rum to sacrifice to his deities. Both these delicacies were supplied; I am unaware how he disposed of them, but next morning his bleary eyes and shaking hand were evidences of a night passed in vigils, either festive or prayerful. He first begged to be placed on the largest elephant, as he remarked that the tigers would specially resent his appearance as their enemy, and next drawing from his girdle a small copper bell he suspended it tinkling from finger and thumb, muttering at the same time some unintelligible sentences; then after apparently receiving whispered instructions he silently led the way through the forest, followed by the sportsmen, whose feelings varied between shamefacedness and contempt.

I must explain that at this season of the year the forest has already been devastated by jungle fires, and only here and there

are patches of unburnt grass left either by accident or on account of the dampness of the locality. As a male tiger stands some three and a half feet high and weighs about six hundred pounds, I was both astonished and angry when the tiger charmer stopped at the edge of a small patch of grass which might have concealed a pig or deer, but certainly could not, in my opinion, afford suitable cover for a tiger. When I represented this to the old man he merely replied : "the tiger is there," and we, traversing the grass, passed out on the other side without discovering any living creature. We again appealed to our leader to cease his fooling and take us to a more suitable spot, but were met by the same stolid reply.

There was nothing to be done but to try again, and this time we discovered an immense tiger lying crouched between two elephants. He arose on being discovered, and walked slowly in front of the howdah to the edge of the patch of grass, there turning in a dazed way, he calmly regarded us, and fell at once with a bullet behind the shoulder. The extraordinary behaviour of this tiger impressed me more as a sportsman than the proceedings of the old man ; but we both acknowledged that the incident was in every way uncanny. It was yet early in the day and, the bell again sounding, we were led in a bee line to another tiger, which suffered itself to be slaughtered in a similar manner. In five days we bagged six tigers, and only desisted because the old man explained that if we killed all the tigers his trade in charms would be ruined. Concluding that virtue lay in the bell, we offered large sums for its purchase ; these were sternly declined, the owner protesting that he would not part with it till his death and then only to his son. I attempted to persuade the old man to accompany me back to my forest headquarters, where there were tigers familiar with men, whose cunning so far had proved too much for the hunter, but this also he declined, saying that he was too old to travel. Softened, however, by the handsome present we made him, he consented to teach my orderly a charm which would deliver our own tigers into our hands ; with this we were fain to be content, and we parted good friends.

Not many days had elapsed, and the memory of our adventure was still green, when we desired the orderly to prepare the charm, as we intended to slay a very old and cunning tiger who haunted the vicinity of the forest bungalow. Soon the little rows and circles of rice and spices, lighted with tiny oil lamps, were ready, and incantations were being uttered ; then mounting an elephant we wandered along the river bank, where we expected the tiger might be found during the heat of the day. I was full of faith in

our venture, resolved in my own mind that if nothing happened it would be due to some error in our incantations; and in this frame of mind I was not surprised to see our tiger arise from beneath a thorn bush in a most unlikely locality, and walk in the usual dazed condition in front of the line of elephants. His appearance and behaviour were greeted with a murmur of satisfaction by the elephant drivers; here, they said, is a beast we have all known for years, and who has already shown himself superior to our calculations; to-day he is indifferent to his fate; what manner of charm is this that can destroy his sense?

My friend B. had not had his full share of shooting, and I determined that this trophy should fall to his gun. Calling up his elephant, therefore, I relinquished my place and followed in the procession which, headed by the tiger, was slowly advancing to the river. It is no doubt trying to one's nerves to see a tiger do everything that in a normal condition he would never think of doing; to see him traverse the sandy banks of a river, and wade across the stream in open day without sign of fear or hurry. But it was still more trying to see B. fire four shots at short range and to watch the tiger calmly mount the opposite bank and disappear in impenetrable grass without a scratch. We had had our show, and lost our opportunity, and silently regained our bungalow, occupied with our own thoughts; we had no charm to ensure straight shooting.

Shortly afterwards I was transferred from these forests and saw the old tiger charmer no more. He may be still alive; his assumption of power may have been a deception, but though I have faced many tigers since that time I have never yet seen one behave in a similar way, or yield up his life with such ease and indifference.

Let us change the scene from the heat and damp of the Nepal Terai to the snows and rocks of the Himalaya, where, at an elevation of fifteen thousand feet, the sportsman in the autumn hunts the mountain sheep, and, if lucky, occasionally gets a glimpse of the wily ounce, or of the lovely snow partridge. Here are a few scattered villages, whose inhabitants till the terraced fields for a scanty crop of millet, and tend the apricot and walnut orchards, whence they obtain oil for lighting and cooking, and dried fruits which give a relish to their frugal repasts. In winter they are snowed in for weeks and months at a time in their solid houses of stone slabs, and no doubt they see and hear wonders, dwelling as they do on the roof of the world, that unknown region whence originate many of the powers of good and evil which rule the country below.

Can it be possible that these people, who possess, from our point of view, little morality, and no sense of honour, but who are yet the custodians of the most sacred shrines of Hinduism—who guard the temple at Ganjotri and guide the pilgrim's feet to the source of the Ganges—can it be possible that they, deteriorated as they are, still possess in some little measure the powers attained by their more pious ancestry? How otherwise can we explain the facts that they can converse with each other at distances far beyond the reach of the human voice; that they can to some extent foretell the future, whilst the possession of these faculties is sufficiently common to create no surprise amongst their fellows?

The effects of the cyclone of September 1880 penetrated far into the Himalayas; for three days, at an elevation of twelve thousand feet, we, a few natives and myself, lived in peril of our lives amidst torrents of rain, sleet and snow, hearing the thunder of landslips and avalanches around us and deafened by the furious rush of water in the valley below. To light a fire was impossible; we waited wearily for annihilation, and subsisted on what tinned meat we still possessed at the conclusion of a hunting trip. On the fourth day the skies cleared, and we eagerly scanned the opposite hillside, to ascertain if the village was still standing. As the sun broke through the heavy banks of clouds we saw some forlorn individuals on their house roofs, apparently similarly engaged, and my companions at once opened a conversation with them, in spite of the distance, which could not be less than a mile and a half, and in spite also of the fact that the river which flowed between almost drowned our voices when in conversation with each other. There was no apparent effort on our side, and no reply was intelligible to my untrained ear. Yet we asked for assistance, and we received it when, a few days later, the water had subsided sufficiently to permit a chain of fifteen strong men to ford the river and rescue us from starvation.

Later, when the frost had set in, when the glacier streams were at their lowest and the wild sheep at their best, we went together to the glacier, camping in a meadow that in a few weeks would be hidden under twenty feet of snow, and there around the camp fire we fell to talking of witchcraft, and I related some of my experiences to these wild mountaineers. One of them, to my delight, claimed the power of replying, when in a trance, to any question concerning the future, and at once, at my request, began the well-known dervish dance, ending apparently in an epileptic fit and insensibility. From him, by judicious questioning, I gathered all the events of the morrow, and having offered copious draughts of spirits we all retired to rest.

Incredible as it may seem, it is a fact that the occurrences next day fell out as foretold. That the country we visited was as described is not perhaps to be wondered at, for the hunters may have followed the line prescribed by their companion. But that we should have seen the number of animals foretold in the places pointed out, that all details, even of sex, should be accurate, and that the number of shots fired, and their results, should be known beforehand, was inexplicable to me, and I fear must remain so. Such occurrences cease to surprise those who wander much in strange lands, but rather direct attention to the incomplete development of occult powers in more civilised races. The reasoning power of the savage is no doubt as far below that of the average European as his independence is greater; and much as we despise his inferiority when in a civilised country, we cannot fail to recognise his vast superiority when the appliances of civilisation are wanting. His manual dexterity, his power of observation, his physical endurance, are all superior to ours, and when to these we add such gifts as are indicated in this article, we are forced to acknowledge that national progress may entail the loss of certain powers, useful if not absolutely necessary to individuals in a savage state.

II.—IN EVERYDAY LIFE.

When one lives amongst a people who are absolutely convinced of the existence of ghosts and the bodily presence of evil spirits; when one finds as a matter of daily routine offerings displayed for the one and dwelling-places erected for the other, one wishes to be in the confidence of one's neighbours, and to learn the reason for the faith that is in them. Up to the present time men and animals are "overlooked" in India, and it is unlucky to compliment your native friend on his personal appearance, on the beauty of his children, or on the superiority of his cattle; for it is an accepted fact that by so doing you may injure that which has excited your admiration. What we call coincidence, the native considers result; he is content to communicate disease or trouble to man or beast in the belief that it will leave his household, if, by exposing food or coin on the highway he can tempt the ignorant or unwary to accept it; he is a firm believer in a thousand unlucky acts, dates or marks, and he exhibits a childish dread of unusual sights or sounds after sunset.

Happily his senses are not as a rule acute, and as he is either lost in the deepest thought as to the price of food-stuffs, or

shouting at the top of his voice to a circle of friends, he often remains insensible to immediate danger. Contact with civilisation doubtless lessens faith in the supernatural. Belief in witchcraft dies away in the shadow of the law-courts of British rule, but sometimes we are startled by a rerudescence of ancient beliefs, as testified by a cold-blooded murder for the sake of discovering hidden treasure, or the brutal ill-treatment of some unfortunate individual who has been credited with bewitching man or beast. We view these outbreaks with horror, but we forget how far we have provided the incentive to the crime by intensifying the struggle for existence, or creating the lust for wealth, which is not amongst the temptations of a primitive people.

Yet even now in the busy haunts of men we find, in old-fashioned houses still standing as evidence of the first attempts of white men to establish home comforts, belated ghosts appearing in proof of long-forgotten tragedies. Such an ancient building was occupied by C., a Government official holding a high appointment, and moreover a student with a well-balanced mind. To him appeared one day as he sat at his writing-table a pair of twinkling feet that whirled round the room in a giddy dance. No sane person could resist a feeling of astonishment at such a sight; in C.'s case great interest was also aroused, and after careful scrutiny he came to the conclusion that the feet were those of a native dancing-girl. The next step was to convince himself that this was no hallucination, and he called for his native servant and watched the man's demeanour when he entered the room. Surprise was succeeded by horror on the man's face, and he flung up his arms, shrieking that he had seen the dancing-girl and must die. Which he did next day.

C., though disliking the subject immensely, felt it right to make further inquiries, and then he learnt that many who had seen the feet came to no harm, whilst those who saw the whole figure died within twenty-four hours. I have noticed that the principal witnesses of such apparitions are generally reticent, probably from dread of disbelief. C. was no exception to the rule, and this true story has not obtained wide circulation even amongst his personal friends.

But we have all heard how three Englishmen, many years ago, dispossessed a "fakir" of his hut and garden and built a house on the stolen site. How the "fakir" cursed them and predicted the death of all three within the year; how the trio were watched by their neighbours with horror as one was removed by an epidemic, another by an accident, and the third met some unusual fate.

For my own part I would not willingly incur the ill-will of one who claims supernatural powers ; I treat him with respect and consideration, and am glad to see him go in peace, content if in exchange for my offering he gives me his blessing, or perhaps, as a powerful charm, some ashes from his sacred person. I must confess that with all my eagerness and in spite of offering large rewards my eyes have never beheld a demon or spirit, though I have been in their vicinity, heard them when going through their dreary routine, and even observed visible signs of their displeasure. I have twice lived in haunted houses and twice pitched my camp on the site occupied by a spirit. I have also heard tales vouched for as true by those whose veracity I had no cause to doubt ; my experiences have left me without definite convictions, but with a leaning towards the belief of the Hindustani.

My first haunted house was in a small hill station, and the haunt consisted in the perambulation of the stone flagged verandah by heavy footsteps. I was first introduced to this ghost when nothing was further from my thoughts than the supernatural, as some days had elapsed since I took possession of the house, and the ghost had escaped my memory. I was therefore indignant when I heard some one walking in the verandah at night, some one who would not reply to my challenge ; and it was not until I was investigating matters with a lantern, thinking chiefly of burglars, that the peculiarities of the house flashed into my mind. I felt certain then that I should meet that ghost ; I even hoped that he would not put me to shame by appearing in clothes, for I knew that my future audience might tolerate a spirit body but never a spirit suit of clothes. I spent hours in way-laying the footsteps ; I concealed myself in sight of the verandah in and outside the house ; I spread flour on the flags to obtain the imprint of his footsteps, but all in vain, I discovered nothing, the walking continued ; and my servants would only enter the house after nightfall by the backdoor. That these footfalls were not caused by human agency both the natives and I were agreed ; and no explanation of them has yet been offered.

More interesting are those demons who dwell in lofty trees in the vast jungles of India ; who frequent the summit of the wind-swept passes of the Himalaya, or live in those chasms which the mountaineer bridges with his frail rope of twig or elastic sapling. Such spirits are part of the life and faith of the people, and are fortunately easy to propitiate ; if you desire the shade of his tree for your midday rest why not politely offer the owner a portion of your food ? If you cross the summit of his pass why not place a stone on the goodly pile already raised by hundreds of believers ?

Before you trust yourself to the swinging footway over the chasm why not add your scrap to the pennants of many colours already flying in the breeze? It may please the mysterious being, and it will at all events satisfy your followers that you do not trust entirely to your luck to overcome the dangers that surround you and them. My second haunted house was in a deserted village in a dense forest; it was a good watertight peasant's house of wood and stone, and I desired to utilise it as a shooting-box in the winter, or a protection against the heat of the summer months. But I reckoned without my host, for each night was a time of danger and unrest on account of the volleys of stones which descended from all sides. This I was aware was a favourite trick of the Hindustani servant to express disapproval of his master's actions or surroundings, but I took the precaution to have all my servants in the house at night, whilst I knew that no villagers would dare to cross the forest at that hour to play a trick on an official. Moreover the uneasiness of my servants acquitted them of all connivance in the matter, and I was compelled to accept the verdict that my presence was distasteful to the shadowy tenant, and to leave him in undisturbed enjoyment of his own, lest he should proceed to further violence.

More numerous are those spirits who live in the wilderness, and who in proportion as their power is great are provided by their admirers with food, flowers, water, and even residence. In some instances the sacred spot is enclosed by a fence within which the demon may sit undisturbed by trespassing cattle. It is better to keep the cattle from annoying the spirit than to vex him into causing sickness or death amongst the unorthodox herds. To suit my own convenience, and in spite of the expostulations of my servants, I pitched camp one day on a spot of evil repute, near a burning ghat on the River Ganges; the weather was hot, and there was, I considered, space enough for ourselves and for the local demon; but to him I paid no attention, and night fell on groups of nervous servants huddled for mutual protection round the camp fires. My companion G. was one of the most powerful men I had ever met, he was in robust health and laughed to scorn any belief in the supernatural. Yet during the night I was awakened by lusty calls for help, and full of thoughts of man-eating tigers or rogue elephants, I seized my rifle and rushed to his tent. I found him alone, but in a piteous state of terror. He declared that he had watched a human hand appear through the curtained doorway and descend slowly towards his head; that he was powerless to move to grasp his weapons or resist this horror, that he was seized with unreasoning and disproportionate terror, and only

found voice to call for help when he had already felt a clammy pressure on his face. Now this may sound very like the agonies of nightmare, but the natives accepted the story as a proof of the inevitable result of intrusion on the spirit of the grove ; my friend was absolutely convinced of the truth of the apparition, and as usual in such cases declined to discuss the matter further ; thus I alone was left doubting, yet believing enough not to risk a second night in this unpleasant spot.

I am reminded of another incident, when two of my servants, Mahomedan unbelievers in ghosts and witchcraft, elected to sleep one night in a hut provided by friendly villagers for the use of a spirit who frequented a large tree in the neighbourhood. The weather was wet and stormy, and in spite of repeated warnings these men determined to annex the demon's dwelling. Had they only paid proper respect to their host he might not have resented their intrusion ; as it was they passed the night without disturbance, were looked at with interest by the villagers next morning, and before sunset one was incapacitated with fever, the other with an abscess on his foot. They still say that they have no belief in the supernatural, but I know nothing would induce them to commit a similar trespass for fear that worse should befall them.

It is interesting to contemplate from the point of view of the dweller in the forest the inexplicable forces which surround him. Your disbelief or contempt do not shake his faith, though he may admit that you do not come under the rules which govern his life ; your arguments will not turn him from his belief, for he has nothing to gain from a change of opinion, and may indeed suffer severely in consequence. It is best therefore to acquiesce outwardly in his theories, for only by so doing do you learn much that would be otherwise hidden from you, only by so doing can you hope to succeed in gradually gaining the confidence of your companion, though the penalty may be that your own scepticism is shaken.

S. EARDLEY-WILMOT.

All Souls' Eve.

"I am thyself, what hast thou done to me?"

To the Rev. Father Elliot, S.J., The Mission House, Soochow, China.

London, December, 1900.

It is long since I have written to you, very long since I have seen you; it is likely to be still longer ere we meet again, or I should pause before writing this letter. In the old days we said and believed we had no secrets one from another. Now the reserve, born of years of absence, has grown like a veil between us, yet I do not forget that on the further side of that veil is the closest and truest friend I have ever known or am ever likely to know.

It was to you I turned when the great grief of my life fell upon me, the death of my promised wife, a week before the day which should have seen our wedding; and I paid, as one is apt to do, the price of laying bare one's heart even to one's dearest friend, by a feeling of shyness towards you ever since. The fault was mine, not yours. I had told you my loss, my passionate unavailing agony of grief—how could I confess to you the fashion in which I strove to drown that anguish? You will understand that from your experience as a priest, unless Chinese catechumens are very different from Englishmen, who "thank the goodness and the grace," &c.

Now once more, Cyril, I turn to you, and partly because you are not only my oldest friend, but a priest. Don't mistake me, I have no yearning to be received into the fold of the true Church—I am as obstinate a heretic as when we parted. But you are an earnest man and a good man, you have learnt sympathy with your fellow-creatures by years of self-abnegation and by the memory of your own manhood, its rights and its joys, freely offered up in the service of God and of your fellowmen. You have heard many strange stories whispered through the confessional-lattice, I can trust you to listen to the one I have to relate. Some one I must tell, and it is you to whom I choose to

relate this experience, dream, delusion—what you will—of your old friend, Martin Lyall.

Ten years ago, shortly after your reception into the Roman Church, we parted, each to follow our separate ways—you to take up your cross in strange lands as a Jesuit missionary, I to remain here in London town in the full flush of life and happiness and the surety of Beatrice's love. You knew her, and in that all is said. Surely even you, to whom human ties have become but links with a higher duty, can realise the hopeless night which fell upon me when she was taken away.

"I was to follow her," you say. What strength had my feet to tread so stony a road alone? The roses which wreathed the path she trod were fallen, the sunset glory at the end was hidden by clouds. She was gone: I turned aside to ways gay with far different flowers, which at least could not remind me of her. Unfaithful even to her memory! Yes.

Did I cease to love her? I do not know. I never ceased to long for her.

A week ago, as I was sitting in the evening by the lonely hearth I once thought would be so warm and bright, the sudden remembrance of her made the old aching passion of loss sweep over me once more. I strove against it, tried to put it behind me, and forgot "that, 'had,'" and "how sad a passage it is"; as, when I had finished dinner, I drew nearer to the fire to enjoy half an hour of slumbered luxury before rousing myself to the trial of dressing, preparatory to a nocturnal journey to Kingston-on-Thames, to the house of my married sister. She had a dance on that night, November 1st, for her eldest girl's eighteenth birthday, and I knew that if I did not turn up it would be held a grievous offence, for which the bitter cold and fog which had ushered in the birth of the melancholy month would be no sufficient excuse.

Why to-night of all nights would my thoughts recur to my dead love? To banish them, I rose and took down a book from the shelves—the first that came to hand. Was it fate that the volume should be Dante, and the Sortes at which I opened it the lines—

"When from flesh
To spirit I had risen; and increase
Of beauty and of virtue circled me,
I was less dear to him, and valued less.
His steps were turned into deceitful ways,
Following false images of good, that make
No promise perfect."

It was as though she herself had spoken through her namesake. Oh, my Beatrice, whose loss left me unblessed, undone!

I reached Kingston some time before eleven ; the dance was in full swing, but I was rewarded for coming by the real pleasure both my sister and my little niece showed at seeing me. The latter, in the glory of her first ball-frock and posy, was yet mindful of old friends.

"I have kept you a dance, Uncle Martin," she said, with pretty pride, displaying her crowded card. "And, oh ! thank you for the lovely flowers."

"Are they satisfactory ?" I asked. "I wanted to choose them for you, but I was so busy this morning I could only wire to the shop and tell them to send them down here."

"Oh, they are delicious ! smell them !" she answered, holding up the pyramid of fragrant blossoms I had not yet glanced at ; their perfume struck me, bringing back, as scents will, the whole past in a wave of remembrance. Why had they sent as my gift to this child the great white bell-like blossoms Beatrice had worn when I told her of my love, which she had promised to wear as my bride, which I laid on her breast when I took my last look at her face, and on her tomb when that face was hidden from my sight ; the flowers I held sacred to her, and to her alone ?

I was thankful little Violet was claimed at that moment by a partner, and was too eager to enjoy her dance to wait and make me retract my disclaimer to her kindly demur that she must find me a partner first. She glided off, young and glad and fair, and I remained at my post, watching the dancers, with an odd fantastic sense of unreality—wondering whether I was unreal, or if this crowded room, the lights, the flowers, the throbbing swaying rhythm of the dance music, the waves of dancers circling past me, were but shadows, that I seemed so apart from the life around.

"Are you going back to Hampton Court to-night ?"

I started ; but the words, though spoken close by, were not addressed to me. The speaker, a young girl, had halted with her partner by my side, and he answered :

"Of course I am ; I'm staying there till my leave is up."

"And you are not afraid ?"

"Afraid of what ?"

"Of ghosts."

"Of ghosts—why should I be ?"

"Don't you know ?" said the girl, as in jest, yet with a touch of earnest in her voice. "Do you remember what to-day is ?"

"The first of November ; four days off Guy Fawkes' Day."

"Nothing else ?"

"Nothing that I know of. I never could cram dates—had to write them on my shirt-cuff always. What is it ?"

His companion laughed a little impatiently.

"Can't you remember," she said, "what it is—in the Calendar, I mean ?"

"The Calendar—what Calendar ? You're every bit as bad as an examiner. Oh ! I know," as a light broke in on him, "the church-going dates, you mean. Wait a moment and I'll tell you. It's All Saints' Day."

"Yes, and All Souls' Eve," the girl answered, and, despite herself, her voice was lower, graver, almost awestruck, as she went on : "haven't you heard the old legend, 'On All Souls' Eve the Dead walk on Kingston Bridge ?'"

The words startled me strangely. I moved away, not wishing to hear the laugh from the young man which I knew would follow them. Yet I should have laughed had they been spoken to me—I laughed now at myself for being moved by them—and yet—

Ah ! if it were only true—if in this life I could hope to see again even the shadow of Beatrice, would not all the past grief and ache and longing melt away, and the sense of her love, unchanged, unchangeable in death as in life, enfold me once more ? She had not forgotten the past, I knew ; in heaven itself she would only wait and long for her love as she did when I was absent from her on earth. I smiled bitterly at the thought of people "afraid of ghosts" when I would give all the world, with its living men and women, to touch the misty hem of one sweet ghost's robe, to hear one word, faint as the sigh of the night wind, from her shadowy lips.

"On All Souls' Eve the Dead walk on Kingston Bridge." The echo of the words haunted me like a spell ; they set themselves to the sob of the waltz music—it was the "Manolo," the strange dirge-like melody which she had loved, which is so apart from other waltz music in its sadness and passion ; and as it rose into a cry, it sounded like the wail of spirits outside in the cold, unheeded, uncared for by those within. How could I be such a fool ? I tried to shake off the power of the phrase which haunted me, but it would not be banished. "On All Souls' Eve the Dead walk on Kingston Bridge."

Where was I going ? I had left the ball-room, had left the house—was out in the night, wandering vaguely down by the dark laurel trees skirting the drive.

The cold breeze struck freshly on my forehead; above, the moon was climbing the sky wearily, her waning orb dim behind the grey veiling clouds; and at my feet, in the darkness, the pale dead leaves drifted, as if leading me on—whither? I was not going to the bridge—I knew too well what a fool's errand that would be. In this world at least the dead past buries its dead, never to rise again save in vague wraiths of memory and remorse. Nevertheless, the power of the words, "On All Souls' Eve the Dead walk on Kingston Bridge," held me, and thither my impulse was leading me involuntarily to keep my vigil.

It was near midnight when I passed down the market-place of the old town, fast asleep, except where here and there a light gleamed from an upper window. The breeze smote me more strongly now, bearing with it the chill of the river. I would fain have turned back in self-scorn of the mad fancy which would not be denied, but I could not.

I reached the bridge, and could see below me the wide grey wash of the water, the darkness of the trees beyond, the faint reflection of the moon in the silent current. I saw and heard nothing else; I stood on Kingston Bridge—alone.

A scorn of my own folly rose within me. I leaned over the side of the arch under which the river flowed, remembering how often she and I had passed beneath it in the happy summer-time, with oars and pulses alike beating to the rhythm of our glad young life. No, the Dead did not come back; the sad sound of the ripple washing round the piers below seemed to mock my desire. Kingston Bridge was unhaunted save by memories of her.

Was it so? I started. Surely there was something strange around me, something which chilled me with a colder breath than that of the night wind blown across the river; the sense of a force as of life which was not life about me, of the thronging encompassing presence of a great multitude sweeping past, whence and whither who could tell? Dim and vague, yet felt through every quivering nerve of sense, they held their way onward in the midnight silence. "*Les morts vont vite.*"

A dread seized me; I steadied my hand on the icy stone of the parapet, as struggling by the contact to retain my consciousness of tangible things, while out from the wintry mist glanced forms I had known long since—had never thought to look upon again. Vague, awful, aloof yet real, they passed me, the men and women I had once talked and walked with, played and worked with, loved or hated, who were counted now among the Dead. Only these could I perceive among the countless hosts

whom I felt rushing past me—the unknown Dead went by me unrevealed.

They knew me, or so I fancied, those whose faces I had known, now shadowed forth more or less clearly to my eyes; some strangely vivid, as they were in my memory, some dim and scarce realised, whom I could hardly recall, having long since forgotten. Their glances brought back, as in a vision, the past shared with them. The mother vaguely remembered, who died in my childhood—was that white form her spirit, and could she know in me the boy she had left? Old schoolfellows, relations, friends, and others whom I had disliked or despised, contemned or injured—I knew them all. The unconscious gaze of the baby-brother who had been buried with our mother in one grave, flitted by me, even as there flashed past a face both you and I remember—that of Jack Eden, as we last saw him, laid pale and stark on the river bank by Iffley, the water dripping from his thick dark curls. These and many more were revealed to me for a moment, then lost again in that mighty unseen crowd, streaming on and on across the bridge, under the wintry moon of All Souls' Eve.

Strange as it may seem, the horror left me, and my heart grew bold. I scarcely heeded the Dead, far less dreaded them, for was not she among them? and how could terror live before the passionate question rising to an awful rapture of hope—"If others, why not she?"

Why did she tarry—she, for whose sake I would have braved a world of ghosts or men? Did she not know I was waiting, yearning, hungering for her?

My eager breath came fast as the wraith robe of a woman's form glimmered out from the darkness, and I leaned forward in the hope that it might be she. Then the blood rushed back to my heart with a recoil of deadly anguish and remorse, for it was another whose gaze met mine, in whose dead eyes I read the record of her shame and sin, and knew that it was in part my own. In that terrible hour my heart was thankful that the first undoing of that poor spirit had not been my work; yet none the less, the message of her forlorn glance faced me sternly—"Thou art the man." It seemed to bar me from even the thought of that other, my fair saint, whose memory had not sufficed to withhold me from wronging her and myself.

Even as I looked she vanished; even as she vanished there came towards me—Beatrice!

Surely no ghost this; rather her own sweet self as she lived, her fair hair shining in the faint moon-gleam, her deep eyes

serene as when they last bent their fading light on me. The grave was not pitiless ; it had rendered her back—nay, rather, had had no power to hold her ; and in the over-mastering joy of her presence I forgot all else—all wrong, all sin, all sorrow, all remorse. Oh, weary years now past and gone ! Oh, weary years still to be endured ! There was hope and healing yet, now that she had come to me, that I had her again, that if only for an instant our eyes might meet, though touch of hand or lip could never be.

Involuntarily my arms stretched out towards her as she approached ; but I could utter no word, only a long sigh of yearning as the clear and awful sweetness of her look met mine. And in that moment all agony was consummated.

She did not know me—she did not know me—although she saw me, looked at me.

“ Oh, my love,” I sobbed, “ my love ! ”

A perplexed trouble crossed her countenance, as though she heard my appeal. Then she passed—passed from me, unheeding, leaving me to a desolation I had never felt before. Others, that other whose gaze had smitten my soul, had known me, and she had not. Was it all nothing to her now, that past which with me outweighed all the rest of life—which made riches, fame, honour, love, valueless, unshared by her ?

This was the bitterness of death ; her spirit held no thought of me, no memory of our happiness, no pity for my loss and anguish. So, as I turned in my despair to hide myself, I cared not where, another ghost fronted me, and I saw and understood all.

For it was my dead self, the old self Beatrice had loved.

Small wonder she had not known me ; what had I in common with this shade which faced me—the wraith of a boy, full of a boy’s faults, but manful, earnest and true, whose very love for her was born of love of right, of faith in good and of an heroic hope ? Others who had known me but from the outside might recognise me now ; not so she, who had looked inward to the very soul, and so had loved not me, as I met her again—wearily, purposeless, worthless—but the brighter, braver self whom I had slain, whose ghost met me now with stern condemnation. All other sins sprang from that first one, the murder of the better self so dear to her. It was not death that had severed us, but life—the life which had so dealt with me that her pure spirit was powerless to recognise the man whom she had loved, and whom she loves on through eternity.

But what if she should never find him again, if the future should only widen the gulf between us ? I leant on the parapet,

my head sank on my folded arms, and I lost all consciousness alike of the Dead and of myself.

The hours sped on, how I know not, nor what worked within me then—the death of my baser self, or the resurging of the old life I had lived with her; but when I raised my head it was dawn, the dull red light of the November sunrise fell on the leaden water, and the sere leaves of the trees shone palely yellow in the low sullen gleam. All Souls' Eve was past.

You may question the reality of the vision. I cannot, for its work remains with me, and will remain with me to the end, till I, too, am gathered to that great army of shadows, whose deeds remain, and for good and evil, work in that life of man, to which their authors have bequeathed them: to mingle in sweetness or bitterness in that great tide of human endeavour and human aspiration which flows ever onward, as the river flows under the piers of Kingston Bridge. Will that stream of time also find a sea?—a sea laughing in the morning light, under the radiant sky, stainless and infinite, where I at last may hear a woman's voice, diviner, but no sweeter than of yore, saying to me, even as she whose name she bears spake to her servant and her poet—

“I am, in sooth, I am Beatrice.”

Your friend,

MARTIN LYALL.



Two Against Fate.

"And so you believe it?" she said.

"Yes," he admitted. "There is no escape, it is true."

"Tell me again," she urged. "It is terrible and yet fascinating. What is it exactly?"

"I cannot tell you exactly," with a slight emphasis on the last word, "for I don't know. It may be variegation or disease; it is white, a blasted, deathly thing, that comes to the trees or the plants. And when it comes the head of our family must die. It is our fate."

"Yes?"

"The knowledge of it has been handed down as a secret from father to son for nearly four hundred years; other people may have seen, but they have not known that it was fate."

He spoke in the monotonous tone of one who repeats by rote; evidently there was some purpose in his tale, for it was uttered against his inclination. She raised her head and looked at him.

"Why do you tell me?" she asked.

His voice changed suddenly.

"I don't know what the rest of us have done," he said abruptly, "but I couldn't ask you to be my wife unless you knew. Now will you take me and the Manners' fate, such as it is?"

She stood silent, flushing up to the roots of her hair, one foot stirring the gravel uneasily, her gaze on the far-away woodland. Thoughts crowded her brain—love, wonder, awe, and over all a sense of revolt at the idea of a compelling fate. She was young, and the young are strong before the unknown. She raised her head again, and looked Manners straight in the eyes:

"I will take you," she said, "but," with a quick gesture of dissent, "as for your fate, God is stronger than any fate, and in His name we will fight it."

Six months later George Manners brought home his bride. It

was six o' clock on a wet September evening when the carriage turned in at the gate and up the avenue of beeches. There were decorations—sopping, dripping, decorations. The red letters of the mottoes had streaked the white foundations; here and there the boisterous autumn wind had loosened a fastening, and a corner of a "Welcome Home" flip-flopped dejectedly backwards and forwards, whilst showers of heavy drops fell from the swaying evergreens upon the watching crowds beneath. For there were crowds, even on an evening like this, dripping but enthusiastic—men with upturned coat-collars, women with fringes out of curl and wisps of wet hair blowing in the wind. There should have been a band, too, but it had shrunk from facing the steady down-pour, and indeed it was no loss.

Geraldine's spirits sank; there was something sordid in such ugly, futile failure; if she had been superstitious it might have oppressed her as an omen. Half-way up the avenue the house came into sight round a bend.

"Look," said her husband, "there it is."

Just a glimpse, till the road straightened again, of a homely, rambling grey house with central porch and outstretched wings. Her interest quickened.

"Ah!" she said involuntarily, "this is better."

He turned and laid his hand on hers. They had both felt it then, the dreariness of the homecoming; but to him it was more than that, it reminded him of his fate. He wondered how much it meant to her. She divined his question instinctively, and smiled back at him.

"We are together," she said, "and," quoting unconsciously, "two are better than one."

"No," he answered, "you are wrong; one is better than two."

She laughed.

"Just think," she said, "I had forgotten!"

So, after all, it was with a thrill of laughter that they crossed the threshold of their home.

It was a quaint old place, built piecemeal by many generations. The result was, roughly, a central greystone mass with wings stretching to the front. But of styles of architecture it boasted as many as there had been individual builders. Roofs heaped at all sorts of heights and angles, here a turret, there a projecting porch, or a quaint corner with stone seat and canopy-work; ornamental chimneys in stacks, windows ecclesiastical with tracery, windows domestic with plain stone mullions, windows in the oldest part set deep into the wall.

The main rooms were large and high, but the house abounded

in odd corners which seemed to have been left out of the architects' calculations, and to have owed their existence to the exigencies and shape of the larger rooms. Unexpected staircases, narrow and twisted, led in the side wings to passages above. Steps up, steps down, awaited the unwary in dark corners; but those who knew and loved the place found in this exaggerated irregularity its characteristic charm.

"Come up and see the lane," said Manners after dinner.

"The lane?" Geraldine repeated, looking toward the curtained windows against which the rain still beat heavily, and then down at her chiffon-ruffled dress. "It is so late, and I am really too lazy to change all my things."

"You may trust me," he said, with amusement in his eyes, "you shall not spoil your frills."

He led the way, through the hall, up the main oak staircase, into the passage above. She followed, mystified.

"This is the lane," he said.

"What?" she asked, more puzzled than ever.

"This passage," he explained; "it goes right through the house, wings and all, and it is as irregular as the rest of the place. It has always been called the lane, at least for over a hundred years. There is an old letter which I'll show you some day, and it speaks of 'that Layne which goeth threw the House.'"

Geraldine nodded. The quaintness of the lane and the oddness of its name fascinated her. Her eyes were roaming now over its treasures—carved oak chairs and presses, old china, old books, old pictures. Suddenly she stopped short.

"Who is that?" she said, turning to Manners. "Do move the lamp nearer, I want to see him."

"It is not worth looking at," he answered hurriedly, "the artist is unknown."

"I don't care about the artist," she said, "I want to see the man."

He obeyed her, shifting the lamp so that its light might fall upon the picture, and standing in full view himself.

"He has a very proud face," she said slowly. "Proud, and yet there is fear in it too. The fear is in the eyes. Ah!" she turned quickly, "that is not all; the eyes are like yours in one thing, they see something."

"See something?" Manners echoed.

"Yes," she answered, "yours are grey, and his are brown, but you both see something with your minds that most people have not seen."

His arm jerked uneasily.

"Who would not!" he muttered, too low for her to hear.

"What is this painted in the corner," she went on. "It looks like . . . oh-h," and her words seemed to catch in her throat. She looked at him, "Is it?" she said very low.

George held his breath for a second, then he moved and drew her to him.

"Yes," he said gravely.

For there in front of them, roughly painted into the picture by the hand of some Manners dead long ago, was an ivy sprig, and most of its leaves showed a deathly, blasted whiteness. Underneath, in dim outline, ran date and age—1510, aet. 48. The fate had suddenly become terribly real to Geraldine. She felt so weak, so girlish, in face of it. Her eyes darkened as she thought of that long family line, doomed one by one, and she could not wonder that its shadow brooded over her husband, making him graver and more silent than most men. She had learnt much to-night, more indeed than Manners had intended, but she felt that she yet did not know all. She saw no happiness in wilful blindness, it was part of her character to face the worst; so presently she broke the silence, stirring in his embrace till she could see his face.

"There must be a story to that picture," she urged, "tell it me."

"To-morrow," he pleaded, looking down at her.

"No, no," she said eagerly, "to-night, here and now."

"Now, if you will, then, but not here. You are shivering," he answered, as he drew her along the lane toward the staircase.

"I—I didn't know it," she said, "I am not cold."

"That man upstairs," George said when they had settled down again, "was Walter Manners. He died, as you saw, in 1510, and his is the earliest instance we possess of the working of the fate. It must have existed before, because Walter knew of it and feared it, but his, or rather his son's, is the earliest written record. It came to him, as it has come to each of us since, and he thought to cheat it by shutting himself into safety. He had one loop-hole of escape—he had not seen the thing himself, Nicholas, his son, had seen and reported. So Walter shut himself into the lane up there, and one bed-room at the end, closing the shutters and living by candle-light, that he might not see the fate outside. And a report went out that the Squire was 'wood.'"

George stopped; his cigarette was finished; he threw the end of it away and took another, but held it unlit between his fingers. All the time he had been speaking, Geraldine, sitting opposite, had searched his face for a likeness to the man upstairs. She

drew a deep breath as he fell silent ; there was nothing save that vague resemblance in the eyes, and the face was dogged rather than proud.

"He stayed there for eleven months," George went on slowly, "till a little ivy-branch crept in at the edge of a window-frame, and he saw that its leaves were white——"

"Like the picture," whispered Geraldine.

"After that he held up his head no more ; the fate had conquered him, and within the month he was dead. Nicholas painted the ivy and the date into the portrait, Nicholas wrote down what had happened, and he also made the first entry in the roll of fate. Since then, each man has put his name to the roll, and, when each one dies, his successor adds the date and the leaf, one might say the disease, which wrought his death."

Geraldine lifted her head :

"How long is the roll ?" she asked, with a hint of defiance in her tone.

"There are thirteen now," he said.

"And the thirteenth ?"

He hesitated :

"That," he said, "is mine."

She got up and went to him :

"Oh !" she said, "how could you, how could you ! You have gone one step to meet it. Can you wonder if it comes to you now ?"

"It must," he said heavily, "you do not understand. How am I to break a chain which has held more than thirteen generations ? You have not seen the roll with its fatal leaves—here ivy, there an apple-twigs, some so badly drawn that one cannot recognise them, down to that which I, too, added—my father's."

"It was his own mind," she said with a quick gesture of impatience, "his own mind that killed Walter. Nothing happened to him, he just died."

"It has not always been so," her husband answered. "There has been death by violence and by accident as well, but always death within the year. Walter fought the fate, but . . . I have told you."

"He did not fight it," she cried, and a light broke over her face. "He only tried to shirk. There is a world of difference between."

George was silent. He scanned her narrowly ; the small square-set face, and crisp brown hair, the steady blue eyes, the mouth sensitive but firm, the straight well-formed nose with nostrils dilated as at the scent of battle ; Geraldine at peace he

had known, Geraldine the fighter was a revelation. Her unflinching courage stirred him ; he was slow to kindle, but the manhood in him fired now, and the dogged lines in his face strengthened :

“By God,” he said suddenly, “you are right, and we will fight.”

In the morning that last night seemed to them as a dream. The rain had passed, and the sun silvered alike the drops of yesterday, and the morning’s heavy dew. A light mist hung everywhere ; sounds floated up to them from the park, sheep-bells and the lowing of cows turned out from milking, and, from far away, the hum of threshing. There was a sense of distance such as only autumn brings, distance and a vague, indefinite, fleeting beauty. They felt instinctively that the fate-shadow had fled with the shades of night, and that this was their first day at home—“a beginning of days.” Before eight George was astir.

“I shall be down at half-past,” Geraldine had called from her window as he stepped out upon the lawn.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll be back ; I’m only just going round the place a bit.”

She watched him cross the grass with slow lingering footsteps as though he were loth to disturb the morning peace, watched till he reached the high yew hedge upon the left which separated one garden from the other. Then he passed beneath the archway, and she saw him no more.

To him a more than natural peacefulness brooded over the world that morning, and he was happier than he had ever thought to be. Save for himself the great kitchen garden was empty, the men had gone to breakfast. He sauntered down the central box-edged path, with its borders of flowers in tangled autumn profusion, till he came to the cross-path, and the giant medlar-tree which grew there. He looked up casually to note the fruit upon its branches, and, not five yards from him, one little twig showed deathly-white, and blasted against the green.

What happened next he did not know.

When he came to himself he was on the seat beneath the tree. His face was buried in his hands, and he heard himself repeating foolishly in a voice which was not his own :

“So soon. So soon.”

In one instant his world had changed ; he hardly recognised the garden round him, he hardly recognised himself ; even the sun shone with an altered light. He “saw blue,” as men will sometimes see after a great mental shock ; it was as though he

looked through tinted glasses. Then the stable-clock struck the half-hour. He shuddered; Geraldine would be waiting, but he could not, he dared not, meet her like this.

“So soon. So soon.”

It was not that he feared to die when his time should come, but he had been happy—how happy—and now. . . . He had thought to do good work in his generation, he had counted on years to come; his work would be left unfinished, there would be only one year more, perhaps not that. And even this he could have borne for himself, but Geraldine would be left forlorn, alone.

“So soon. So soon.”

And then all his being concentrated in one overpowering sense of personality. What was this fate that it should crush him? Unconsciously his attitude towards it had changed; his awakening of the evening before could not leave him as it found him. As his will rushed back into conscious revolt, a sound, a footfall, fell upon his ear. He was late, and Geraldine had come to seek him. Nearer she approached, till her hand was on his shoulder, her breath upon his cheek.

“What a brown study!” she laughed. “And I am so hungry.”

He turned to her then, suddenly, abruptly:

“It has come,” he said with almost brutal directness, “will you still fight it?”

She turned white as she saw his face. For one instant she recoiled as though he had struck her; then the lines of her face hardened.

“Yes,” she said, and the words seemed to force their way through her firmly set lips. “Yes, we will fight it till it is beaten or we are dead.”

“See,” he said, and led her out and showed her the branch. A new idea seized her; they would fight, and it was her faith that they would conquer. With a quick instinct she emphasised her belief by a simple ritual.

“Break it off and give it me,” she said.

He put the little white-leaved twig into her hand.

“So—o,” she said quickly, throwing it upon the ground.

His mind was set to fight, but he wondered at the womanly readiness of her campaign.

“Put your foot on it,” she said, “as I put mine, and say what I say.”

He obeyed, wondering. Geraldine took his hands, and together they swore:

“We, George Gifford Manners and Geraldine Courthope Manners, will fight this fate to the death. So help us God!”

Then they turned and went back to the house, silently, hand in hand ; but the morning peace had fled, and the sun was veiled, and the distant sounds of autumn held for them both only the echo of the words : " So soon. So soon."

After this months passed smoothly enough. The shadow which hung over them, though ever present, became more and more dreamlike with lapse of time, passing into the background of consciousness. Sometimes Geraldine wondered whether, after all, its effect had not always been mental rather than physical, whether, after all, its power might not be broken merely by the opposition of a firmly-held will. Once or twice she found herself searching her husband's face for the answer, but she would turn away with a sigh, for she felt that whether the thing were real in itself or not, it was a reality for him.

And so the year passed till July, when the old aunts came.

Geraldine had spent a heavy day. George had been very good ; the aunts were his and he took a share in entertaining them. But now, when tea was over, he had gone off into the park with the dogs. It was very dull to be left alone with the two—Lady Chenevix who was deaf and Aunt Everett who mumbled in her talk. They lived in an atmosphere of futile irritation with each other, the effect of their respective infirmities, and it was not exhilarating. Geraldine yawned surreptitiously. Aunt Everett had a taste for genealogies—all her stories were prefaced or interrupted by them, and by explanations and arguments with Aunt Chenevix. With luck she might finish one-and-a-half before the dressing-bell, the other half would be produced at dinner and perhaps the beginning of a third. She was a modern parody of Scheherezade. Geraldine was terribly bored ; more so, it seemed to her, than the occasion warranted.

"A thousand and one nights of Aunt Everett," she pondered, "how utterly unbearable!"

From a quarter mile away across the park came the sound of rifle-firing. It was just loud enough for Aunt Chenevix to hear.

"What is that?" she said. Her tone was a trifle querulous, as if she were tacitly accusing someone of not speaking out.

"It is the new volunteer rifle-range in the park," shouted Geraldine. Aunt Chenevix shook her head.

"I wonder George could allow such a dangerous thing," she said.

"It is quite safe," explained Geraldine politely, "it could not be farther from the house because of the road, and there are red flags to warn people."

"Yet," interposed Aunt Everett, "you do hear of accidents. There was a man I know of, he was cousin to——"

"Oh, yes!" Geraldine persisted hurriedly, "but this range is quite safe. George said so."

She did not feel moved to tell the aunts exactly how George had expressed himself—just now she was too much bored, but the words came back to her mind: "It would take a very green Johnny," George had said, "to fire as wide as those flags."

"Cousin to Lord Thurlow," mumbled Aunt Everett, "and his grandmother——"

But Geraldine's thoughts were hopelessly astray. Why, she wondered suddenly, had those words come back to her so strongly? For weeks they had been wiped from her memory, five minutes ago she could not have quoted them, and now she scarcely heard Aunt Everett for the sound of them in her brain. All at once the meaning of it flashed upon her. The shadow of the fate closed round her, and she knew with certainty that the "green Johnny" was shooting on the range to-day, and that in some strange way he and the fate were one—that fate which was closing in at last, and George was somewhere, she knew not where, alone. She rose blindly, scattering her embroidery from her lap, and fled through the garden door.

"What is it?" she heard again in the querulous tones of Aunt Chenevix as she went. They came to her as though years of time had rolled in between them and her. The muffled answer from Aunt Everett was lost. Whether she herself answered she scarcely knew; but she seemed to hear a voice which said:

"The green Johnny."

The ground fled from under her feet, and she saw but one thing as she went, even as she heard but one. By the side of the archway which led to the kitchen garden on her left grew a crimson rambler. The height of its first bloom was over, only a belated blossom showed here and there. Of all the things round her Geraldine saw but one—a rose-branch whose leaves were deathly white and blasted. She fled on, down the lawn, over the ha-ha—whether by the bridge or not, she never knew—across the park, making mechanically for the nearest point of the rifle-range. She was going more slowly now; her shoes were slippery on the grass, her feet seemed weighted with lead, and her knees trembled under her; she panted heavily:

"O God," she cried, "that I may be in time!"

For George was alone, and the fate was falling, and it needed the strength of two to fight it.

As she passed out through scattered groups of bushes into

more open ground, the rifle-range lay across her path. She had come out near the targets, and there, by the last boundary flag, on the firing side of it, stood George. Her heart leapt till she nearly choked; he was safe. She supported herself where she stood, against the trunk of a half-grown beech.

"George!" she cried, holding out her arms to him and crying, "George! George!"

He faced round and looked at her, wondering. It was enough. The ping of a bullet, a sharp sound of splintering wood, and the flag behind him fell with its shaft shot through at the place where his heart had been. The gravity of his face deepened; he went back to her quickly, silently; the suddenness of the unsuspected danger seemed to have dazed him. As for Geraldine, all her courage had ebbed from her; she crouched down at the foot of the tree sobbing uncontrollably.

"It—it was th—the green Johnny!" she burst forth brokenly as he came to her. Then he too remembered those idle words of a few weeks back. He gathered her in his arms and quieted her like a child.

"Yes," he said slowly, his mind waking to the full force of what had happened, "but for you I should have been——"

Geraldine laid her hand upon his mouth; even the word was more than she could bear when death itself had been so close.

Then July passed into August, and the fate had threatened them no more.

"Should you mind very much," George said one afternoon, "if I brought Ritterbaum back with me to dine and sleep?"

He had paused a moment on his way out to the dog-cart. Geraldine was waiting to see him off. She raised her eyebrows slightly in surprise.

"Why," she answered, "that is the German boy who is lodging at the Grange, isn't it? What do you want with him?"

George lowered his tone.

"I'm sorry for him, poor chap. I've seen him once or twice, and Rice says he lives on a potato a day and is working himself to death over his exam. Says he needn't either, because he's as clever as they make 'em, and dead certain to pass."

"Is he very wild?" she asked a little dubiously. She knew how it was apt to be when some unfortunate appealed to George's heart and imagination, but he had never gone quite so far as this before.

"Poor fellow," he said irrelevantly, with a grave twinkle in his eye, "think of half a potato for dinner and no butter with it."

Geraldine laughed, and when she laughed he won. "I plead guilty," she said, "have it as you will."

She awaited her guest with some anxiety. He came back with George in the evening—a middle-sized, fair German boy, with upright straw-coloured hair, and the inevitable pince-nez. He stooped a little and peered forward with his short-sighted eyes, "eyes with a queer glitter in them," she caught herself thinking. By the end of dinner she voted him "a nice boy." He was clever, certainly, and amusing; he ate like an Englishman and talked like one, only dropping now and again into solitary German words. He was nervous—doubtless from overwork—and there was something about him which puzzled her a little. After dinner, partly in sympathy, partly in curiosity, she tried to make him talk about himself.

"Are you all alone at the Grange?" she said.

"Yes," he said, "I take all my holidays alone."

"But," she asked, "don't you sometimes go back to your people, or do you like England so much better than Germany?"

"Ach, no!" he answered, with a quick deprecating gesture, "I have no people and Germany is my home."

His words were simple, but the yearning tone in which he spoke made her heart ache. He seemed to her at that moment the incarnation of loneliness.

"Are there no brothers and sisters, then?" she went on gently.

"No," he said, "there was Lise, but she died years ago. She was drowned," he continued rapidly, more as if he were picturing something to himself than speaking aloud, "drowned, and I was there—there on the shore. She was older and stronger, but I would have saved her, and the women held me back, they said I could not swim. *Ach, Gott!* I can hear her screaming now; at night I hear her——" He stopped, shuddering, and buried his face in his hands.

In a few minutes he broke silence again:

"She was German," he explained, apologetically, "like me. I loved my mother too, but she was always English."

There was a touch of tragedy in his tone. Then his confidence dried up and he spoke no more of the past.

"And how about the exam.?" George said lazily, from the depths of a big arm-chair, "the doctor told me you were slaving too hard."

Ritterbaum's face changed. He seemed to have been brought back roughly to confront the present.

"Ah!" he burst out, "I am working like th—the——" he

looked at Geraldine, and began again, "I am working all day and half the night. I must pass, I must, I must."

"My dear fellow," said George, still lazily, "you are young enough. Where's the hurry?"

Ritterbaum's eyes blazed; he stammered furiously:

"Th—the—hurry," he repeated, "I tell you there *is* hurry and *verdammte* hurry too!"

George uncrossed his legs and sat up. This sudden excitement startled him.

"Gently, gently," he said.

The fire died out of Ritterbaum's eyes as suddenly as it had blazed: he hung his head.

"You are good to me," he said with a break in his voice, "and—I am not fit to be here."

He half turned and looked at Geraldine, mutely, abjectly, like a dog that has done wrong. She held out her hand to him.

"Poor boy!" she said.

That night, unknown to those within, the fate crept one stage nearer to the house. In the moonlight it might have been seen that the weeping ash-tree on the lawn was touched here and there with white.

In the dark hour that comes before dawn, Geraldine still slept, and as she slept she dreamt.

It seemed to her that she and George struggled together in the waters of an ink-black lake. Ink-black, starless sky stretched above them, and along the shore grew trees whose leaves were deathly white, and blasted. She felt that George's strength was failing; every moment he hung more heavily upon her, and her power to save him grew less and less; yet still, slowly, they moved toward the bank. And then, from out of the thick white foliage, came a voice.

"*Mein Freund*," it muttered quickly and low, "I will kill you. I will bathe the hands in your blood. *Ach, yes, yes!*"

The unseen thing laughed, and the shadow of the fate closed over Geraldine, holding her, crushing her as it had done before. Yet even then she knew that help which would come at call lay beyond the deathly belt of trees. But when she tried to scream the water washed the long strands of her hair between her parted lips and choked her. The bonds of sleep burst suddenly, and she awoke screaming. But the dream still clung about her, the voice still sounded in her ears. Till—in reality it was but an instant—her senses cleared, and she saw. There was a candle in the room, and, a silhouette against its faint light, by the bed

stood Ritterbaum. He was bending over George's sleeping form ; he moved his hand, and something glittered. Again Geraldine screamed, louder, louder, for the help that must come. George stirred : he moved till his profile showed in the candle-light.

"What is it ?" he said drowsily.

Ritterbaum stood up ; he brushed his hand suddenly over his face as though to clear away the cobwebs of the present. He had heard a woman cry in her death-agony before. There was a troubled light of struggling recollection in his eyes.

"Lise!" he said.

Then memory brought reason back to him, and he stood there in his right mind. When the truth broke upon him it was more than he could bear. He turned and fled into the darkness, flinging the razor from him as he went. It fell with a clatter into the bath ; then a splash, and all was still.

Dream and reality, now the danger was over, seemed to Geraldine inextricably mixed, but one thing was certain—she had saved George once more, but only by two seconds. He was wide enough awake now.

"But for you—" he said again.

Geraldine shuddered ; she was so small, so weak, to stand between him and death.

"Where are you going ?" she asked.

"To his room," he said, "it would be brutal to leave him to himself."

"I—I am afraid," she said piteously.

George looked at her and hesitated, then :

"There is nothing to fear," he said, quietly, "the boy is sane enough now. I cannot be a brute."

"He was sobbing his heart out on the bed," George told her afterwards ; "I suppose it was the best thing he could do, but it hurt a fellow to stand and watch him. I got him to tell me things afterwards—said he owed me something, you know, and he couldn't deny that. His mother was English, as he told you, and she set her heart on his being an English doctor. The training, or at any rate the living, costs more here than in Germany, but as long as she lived it was all right ; then she died and her pension with her. There was enough left, just enough, to keep him and educate him till he could earn, always," and George emphasized his words slowly, "always supposing he went straight through his exams. without a hitch. That's where the damage came in. He got into a panic about it, for no earthly reason, and screwed his money and his brains, and . . . there you are."

"Yes," she said, "but what next?"

"Oh!" he said, fidgeting a little in his chair, "Rice took him up to Milner the specialist this morning, and he's to run wild for a year in his beloved Fatherland, some place with a double-barrelled name; and then he may go back to work again, provided he doesn't drive himself silly."

"But," she said, "I don't quite understand. Where is the money to come from?"

"Well, you know, I—er—I mean, he did spare my life after all, you see, and I'm grateful to him, and I've lent it to him for as long as he likes. He wouldn't take it anyhow else. After all," George added bitterly, and the old cloud settled down upon his face, "I mayn't be here, and in that case I am last on the roll." Then his mood changed.

"Thirteenth," he said, "it would be good for the thirteenth to win."

Geraldine sighed. The night's experiences had shaken her more than she would own, especially to George. There was still a month of the year to run, and she dreaded what that month might bring.

"Hang it," said George on the last morning as he opened his letters at the breakfast table, "those idiots Thompson and James are sending the wrong railings. I ordered eight-barred, and they are sending five. A lot of use they'll be for keeping in deer. Sending them off to-day, too! I shall bicycle over to Thorpe and wire to stop them."

Geraldine looked at him anxiously.

"Can't we drive?" she asked, "I ricked my knee yesterday, you know, and I don't think I can ride."

"Of course you can't," he said, "and the horses are all gone down to be shod. Is it very important?"

"Only," she answered very low, and with a touch of wistfulness in her voice, "that it is the last day."

"Well," he said, "I can't wait till the horses come back; the only chance of stopping the things is to go at once. Do you think I'm too young to take care of myself?"

His tone might have warned her that he was in no mood to submit to interference, but in her anxiety she persisted:

"Twice before," she said, and stopped.

George caught her up sharply:

"You would remind me," he said, peremptorily, "that but for you I should not be here now. That is quite true, and yet," his face hardened as he spoke, "I will go to Thorpe this morning,

and I will go alone. What is the good of 'fighting the fate' as you call it, if we knock under like this? It is childish."

"Perhaps," she hazarded, "I could ride after all."

He pushed back his chair and stood up.

"You will not," he said, "you are not fit. I forbid it."

Ten minutes later he was gone. Geraldine watched him from the window, reasoning meanwhile with her fears, and being reasoned with they lessened. In truth what was there to alarm her? Six miles of a country road, ridden alone by an expert bicyclist; that was all. As she looked out at the autumn beauty, silent, misty, fleeting, she almost smiled: the shadow of the fate seemed so far away. Sheep were browsing in the park; the sound of their bells floated up to her, and from the distance came a hum of threshing. The haziness of the September morning clung to things of sound as well as of sight, and spread a veil of mystery between.

"The last day," she mused, and by the fear that thrilled her anew, she understood something of the bliss that might come with to-morrow's freedom.

But George was out of sight and she was restless. She left the breakfast-room, crossed the passage, and went out upon the lawn, wandering aimlessly hither and thither. The crimson-rambler was in flower again; she saw that its leaves still showed white here and there. Nearer home, the weeping-ash was touched with the same strange variegation; she saw that, too, and thought of the "green Johnny" and of Ritterbaum.

"It was I," she said softly, but with a thrill that had in it something of triumph, "I who saved him!"

She turned and looked up towards the house. Then the light of the sun went out suddenly for her, as it had gone out for George a year before, and the strength of the fate came down, crushing her, holding her. For beneath the windows of the library, George's own room, where the love-lies-bleeding trailed its red flowers to the ground, the whiteness of fate lay thick.

She drew in her breath sharply, like one in physical pain, throwing wide her hands in supplication:

"Oh God," she cried, "save him, he is alone!"

A wild impulse seized her to rush upon the deadly thing, to rend it, to trample it into the earth. She took three steps forward and stopped, struck by the futility of her purpose. The fate was there with the inevitableness of fact, nothing could alter that. And they had been so near deliverance—the last day! But she dared not think of the might-have-been, her whole mind must be concentrated on the present; and the present lay

for her now in that one thing, George was alone and she helpless. Fight? How could she, when she knew not whether he were fighting too, whether—the thought choked her—he were not already past fighting. And yet, she was sworn to it, and in that was their only hope. She set her teeth hard, and turned the whole strength of her being into one channel.

“I will,” she said.

She turned and went into the house; instinctively she mounted to the lane; its windows looked out over the way that George must come. As she paced there, to and fro, her eye rested on Walter’s portrait. He had always been a man rather than a picture to her. She stopped before him now.

“*You!*” she said with scorn, “if only you had fought instead of shirking.”

The tall clock farther on ticked dismally:

“Thir-teenth. Thir-teenth.”

How long she waited she knew not—an hour, two hours? She was at the window now, and she heard from a half-mile away the click of the park-gate latch swinging home. She held her breath: he, it, something, was coming. Ah! with a quickening of suspense as the something came into sight—a man on a bicycle riding for dear life; but it was not George.

She met him at the door. He was but an overgrown boy after all; his hand was on the bell, and he started as she came out; her face frightened him; but her voice was steady even to coldness.

“You wanted me?” she said.

“N—no. That is, yes,” he stammered breathlessly, and then he blurred it all out. “There has been an accident—horse shied and upset the cart. They are bringing him home.”

“Bringing him?” she repeated, as if she could not understand. And yet, hidden away in her brain, she felt that she knew better, far better, what it meant than the boy who told her.

“Yes,” he said. “He is badly hurt—concussion or something.”

She breathed more quickly.

“Oh! then,” she said, “he is not—dead?”

He raised his chin a fraction. In his short experience men did not die so easily; why had she jumped to so sudden a conclusion? It was foolish.

“Oh, no!” he said. “They will be here soon,” he added bluntly, “oughtn’t things to be got ready?”

Geraldine’s dazed fit passed. She was wide awake on the instant:

“Yes, yes, of course,” she answered hurriedly, “Good-bye.”

She passed into the house and directed preparations. The

servants obeyed her deftly, silently, for they, too, feared, and her face silenced them. For herself, she was conscious of one thing—she was fighting against a compelling, an arbitrary force—she was fighting for George who was beyond fighting for himself.

When everything was ready she went down to the door once more. There was a steady crunching of feet upon the gravel; she looked out and saw a hurdle with six bearers, and the doctor walking alongside. For full fifteen seconds she could not realise that it was George; this still, helpless figure of a man seemed to have nought to do with her. As they turned the grass-plot she saw his face. It was enough; she trembled from head to foot, but only for an instant, then she clenched her hands. "Fight," she said beneath her breath, "fight."

The doctor scanned her professionally as she came forward. "She will do," he thought, "for the present; but Heaven help her—afterwards."

Geraldine could not talk before the men, but she turned and led the way; up the wide oak staircase and along the lane past Walter's portrait, into the sunny south bedroom. When the rest had, gone, and she was left with Doctor Rice, she turned and faced him.

"Tell me the truth," she said.

He held out his hand to her unconsciously.

"You must be brave," he said, but his words came with difficulty. "He may wake up quietly and almost naturally."

"Yes," she asked, but if not—what?"

Her eyes searched his, steadily, mercilessly. He moved uneasily.

"He may not know you," he answered.

"Is that *all*?" she said, still with that pitiless, soul-searching gaze. He looked away from her, out of the window, anywhere. There was no escape; he looked back again, and laid a hand upon her arm.

"He—may not wake at all," he said.

She gave a half-sob, and turned away from him. Presently he broke the silence.

"You have not heard yet how it happened. Just before he got to Thorpe his tyre punctured. He had ridden over a piece of glass right in the middle of the road."

Geraldine started; her perceptions were all at once inordinately keen.

"I knew it," she murmured. "If I had been there I would have saved him. Two together would have ridden at the side."

"True," he said, but he was puzzled. Then he continued,

"He did his errand, left the machine to be mended, and got a lift with Major Peebles who was coming the same way. The mare was fresh, she shied at a newspaper blowing in the wind, and bolted. They upset at Three Trees corner, and for him," he motioned towards the bed, "it was concussion. The Major escaped unhurt, and he told me."

The Major had escaped, and George lay there bandaged, unconscious. Even for her he would not look nor stir; even for her, just now, he was as dead. She moved from the window and sat down beside the bed. It was one o'clock, and she felt instinctively that till eight on the morrow the battle would be neither lost nor won. Till then, she had to fight for two. She concentrated her will on the moments as they came; till then, there would be for her no past, no future, only a vital, too vital present.

She slipped her hand beneath the bed-clothes and laid her fingers lightly upon George's arm, her head was beside his on the pillow. The doctor watched her narrowly; there was something which he could not fathom. But she had no thought for him. In spite of herself she was conscious of a doubleness of nature which she had never felt before in the same acute degree—one of her was all will, fighting *à outrance*, the other was awake with painful vividness to the trivialities of each moment as it came. And so the hours passed, not long, not short, like the continual present of eternity. As the sun left the windows, as the shadows lengthened, as the night fell, Geraldine scarcely moved. Only when the dead time came with the small hours, something seemed to thrill her. Now and again she moved her head and whispered into the ear of the unconscious man beside her:

"Fight," she said, "fight."

And who can tell whether his soul heard? There was no sign.

Just before seven the sun rose, and the night-lamp burned yellow against the white light struggling through the blinds. Geraldine saw, and for some strange reason it jarred upon her, by analogy perhaps with her own struggle between life and death. The doctor saw it too; he rose and put out the lamp. She looked across at him and signed that he should draw up the blind of the eastern window. All at once she felt that the light of the sun was good. It streamed full upon her, upon her only, while George lay in shadow. The doctor had seen women grow old in one night before; there were lines about her eyes, and threads of silver in her hair. It seemed as if the fate had laid its finger upon her also, the nearest of all to George, but that he did not know.

Still the quarters crept on, still the vividness of the moments

hurt as they passed. The threshing machine had started again, the sheep-bells were tinkling as they tinkled yesterday—yesterday, or was it ten thousand years ago? The window was open, there was a little breeze, and she could hear, she thought, the rustle of every leaf on every tree. A dead branch hung from the climbing rose near by; there was no rustle in that, the sound was hard, almost like castanets. There was movement and the joy of living everywhere.

Then the clock struck the three-quarters. To her tense feeling the sound was loud and clamorous. Her touch tightened imperceptibly on the arm of the man beside her, and those fifteen minutes stretched out before her suddenly, long, interminable as a life-time. At the end would come, what? She held herself, as it were, with both hands. It was almost more than one may bear and live.

As the hour sounded—eight slow strokes—surely never strokes were so slow before—there was a movement, scarcely more than a pulsation, in the arm beneath her fingers. She held her breath; even her heart seemed to stop beating, for an age or an instant.

“What day is it?” asked a voice, George’s voice, weak, but quiet and his own.

Geraldine breathed again, and her heart went on, with a sudden throb.

“Wednesday,” she said gently.

“What time?” he asked, and there was an insistence in his tone that was not there before.

“It has just struck eight,” she answered, low but clearly, so that he might grasp all the meaning of the words.

“Ah!” he said, “then we have won?”

“Thank God!” she answered, as the burden of the fate fell from her suddenly, “oh, yes, yes!”

M. KIRKBY HILL.